ALIEN ISOLATION FIRST REVIEW INSIDE

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Xbox One | PS4 | Wii ... | PS Vita | 3DS | PSP | iPhone | DS | Arcade | Retro

PS4 AND XBOX ONE EVERY BIG RELEASE



GRAN TURISMO SPECIAL
Series creator reveals stunning secrets

"ONLY MY MUM BOUGHT IT"
Big-name devs on their humble beginnings

XBOX ONE'S DESTINY?

HALO

HOW MICROSOFT'S BIGGEST SERIES WILL DESTROY THE CONSOLE WAR

HALO 5

MASTER CHIEF COLLECTION

EXCLUSIVE ACCESS TO BUNGIE & 343



ASSASSIN'S CREED ROGUE
Why Ubisoft's series is taking a huge risk

THE DEATH OF CONSOLES?
Why the games industry is abandoning its greatest creation



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ISSUE 153

HIGHLIGHTS
PROJECT CARS ■ THE DIVISION ■ WORLD OF WARSHIPS ■ MORTAL KOMBAT X
DESTINY ■ OCULUS RIFT ■ WASTELAND 2 ■ LIFE IS STRANGE
THE SIMS 4 ■ POKÉMON OMEGA RUBY & ALPHA SAPPHIRE ■ GAUNTLET

I've always found *Halo* to be a rather intimidating series. The depths of its lore are vast, its multiplayer community fierce, and its development pedigree rich. I can hardly imagine what it must have been like for 343 Industries to inherit such a franchise for *Halo 4*. In some ways I wonder if it would have preferred to kick things off with something more like *The Master Chief Collection*, allowing the team some time to immerse itself in everything Bungie had achieved before beginning its own Reclaimer saga.

Speaking with 343 now I'm hearing a far greater level of confidence coming from the development team. The deference to Bungie and the great things done in the past is still there, but there's also a sense that working on this year's collection is putting that behind them too. It's as if 343 took the feedback from *Halo 4*, then immersed itself in the back catalogue for months and has emerged replenished with new creative vigour. It almost feels like the team is keen to get past this release and start the real work, not to dismiss what's looking like an impressively nostalgic package this November.

Once again, though, Master Chief is being relied upon to save the Xbox, but the question remains whether he still holds the clout to pull it off.

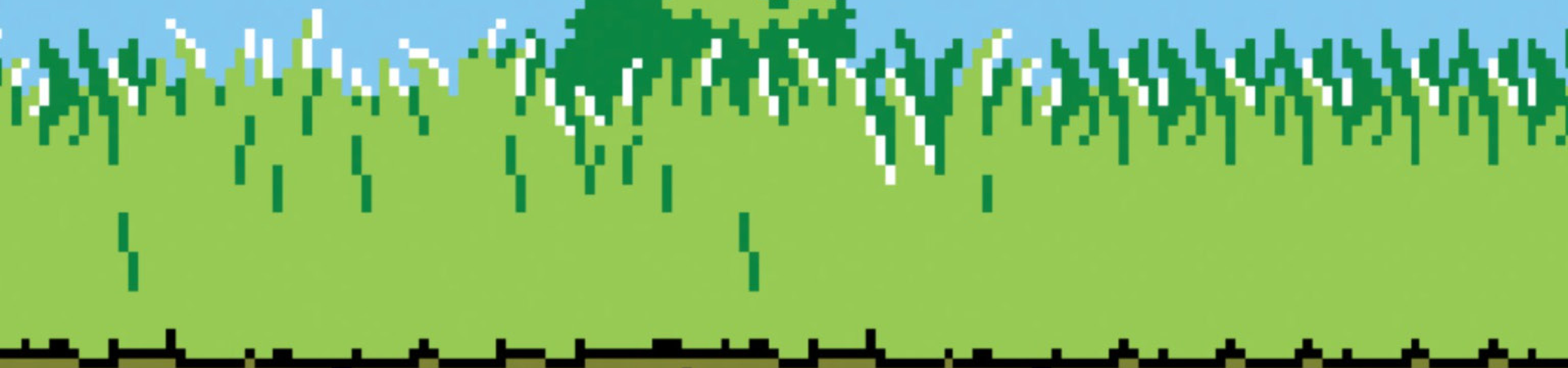
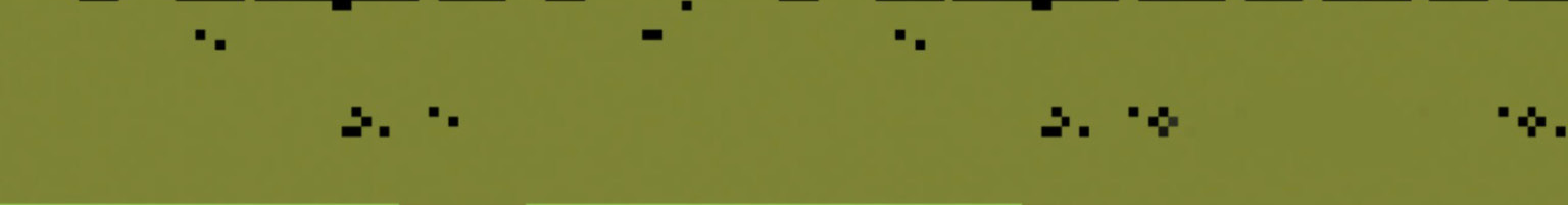
Jon Gordon

Jonathan Gordon
EDITOR




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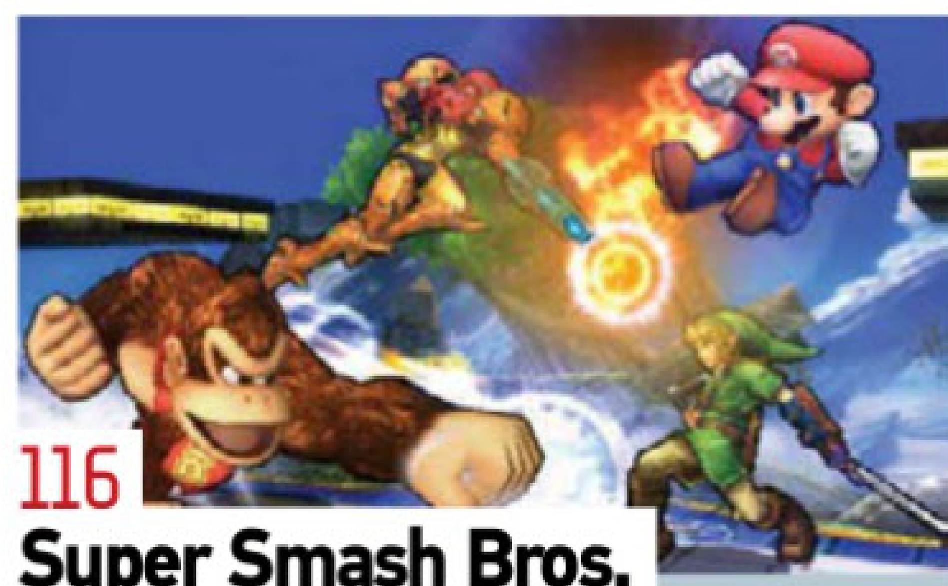




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SCORE

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THE SAVIOUR OF XBOX

HALO

The creative minds behind Halo past, present and future give us their insight on the epic series

(EYE ON THE FUTURE)

Oculus Rift: The future of 3D gaming

→ Some of the best brains in the business are spending billions to plant their flag first. Here's how Oculus is winning the virtual space race

The hardest thing about describing virtual reality is conveying the wonder of things simply feeling 'right'. It's not just about having a screen and a sensor on your head that lets you look around, but the fizzling part of your brain that makes you reach out to try and touch a thing you know isn't there, and which momentarily freaks out at not seeing your hand in front of your eyes. It's the experience of not just being in a virtual environment, but of making eye contact with the characters in it; of the memory of the space itself being mentally filed away as more real than anything that could appear on a flat-screen, like the difference between visiting a place and just seeing a photo of it. It is, without exception, the most exciting thing to happen to gaming since 3D itself first took off. It's also proving trickier to perfect than you might think.

The Oculus DK2 – Developer Kit 2 – is currently the pinnacle of VR technology available – the second dev-kit from the now Facebook-owned Oculus VR. It's available to anyone willing to spend $350 and tick a box to state that they're aware it's not a consumer-grade piece of hardware. This is not a question of modesty. For everything it does well, it's a relatively flimsy plastic piece of kit with several issues that the final consumer version, CV1, will need to fix, including easily scratchable lenses and lens mountings that are far too easy to pop in and out with your head. There's also not much content available for it even if you do buy, with the first Rift games still in development, limited to short 'experiences', or just hacked together support for older games that only work up to a point.

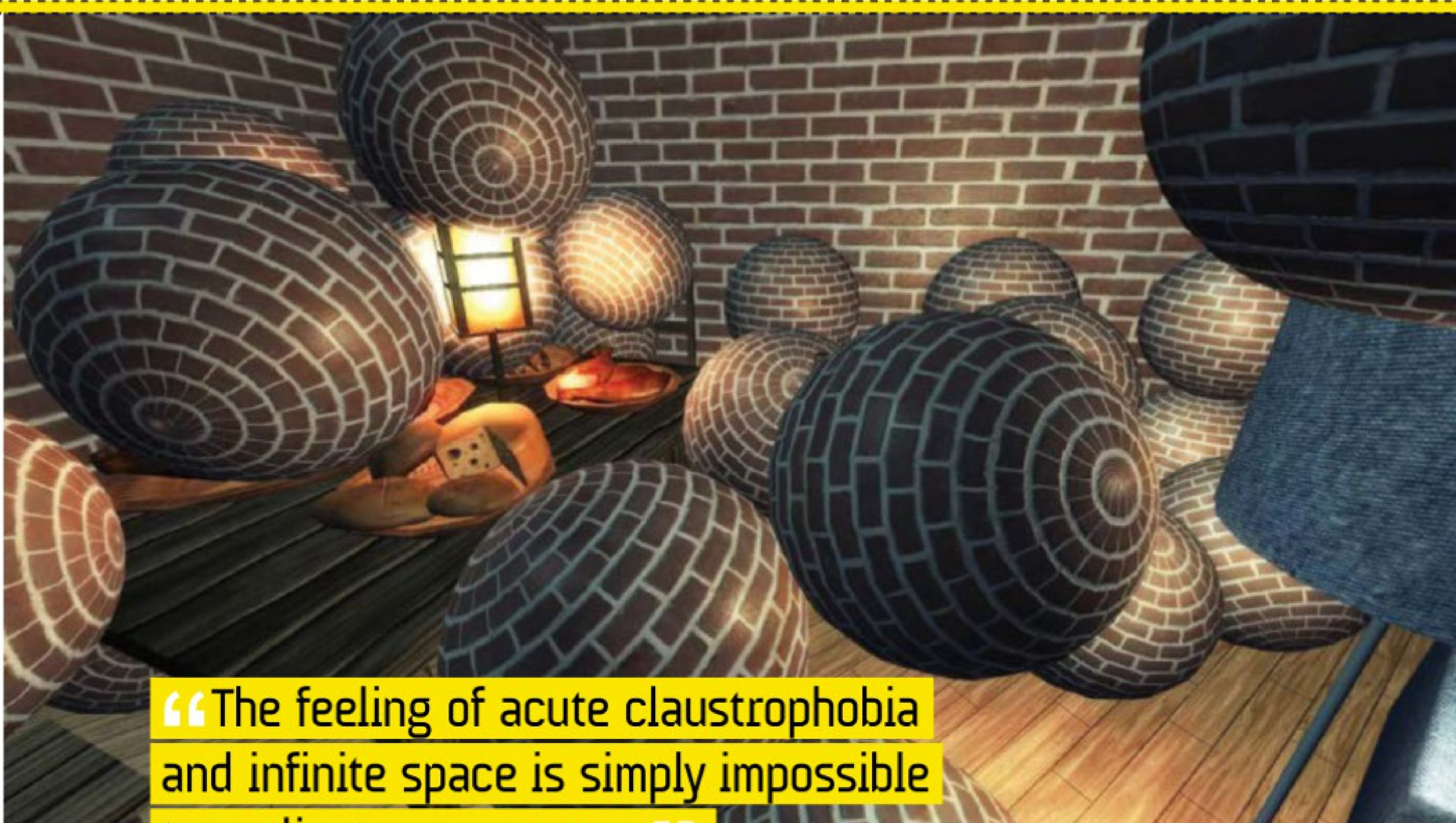


Above Doom/Quake creator John Carmack quit id and joined Oculus as its CTO.

DATA STREAM → MIYAMOTO FINALLY SCREENS HIS PIKMIN SHORT FILM AT TOKYO FILM FESTIVAL

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Your guide to the essential stories





Inset Forget simulators. In this test, a real rollercoaster track was used as the base for a fantasy experience of real-world drops and purely digital monsters.

"The feeling of acute claustrophobia and infinite space is simply impossible to replicate on a screen"







Even when you do find a game worth playing, like *Elite: Dangerous*, the experience isn't necessarily pleasant. It's hot, it's sweaty, and designers are still feeling their way around many details. A VR game for instance can't take camera control away from the player, or it's like a sickening slap in the face. Likewise, going 0-70mph in a single step, in the tradition of games like *Quake 2*, is a horrible experience. Your brain expects a more realistic ramp-up.

It's issues like these that the DK2 exists to help solve though, and the jump in quality from the first devkit last year is impressive. That version was a painfully low-resolution model, just 640 x 800 pixels per eye compared to the DK2's 960 x 1080, with the finished version expected to take another step up. The new version also uses an OLED screen (actually a Samsung mobile phone screen, shared between both eyes) that gets rid of motion blur, and with it both an impediment to realism and a big source of motion sickness. Now, the screen only updates when it's ready, and runs at 75Hz. The DK2 is therefore able to keep up with head movements much more effectively, more precisely, and looks far better as it does so.

There's still a long way to go though, with two big problems to address. The first is that because you're looking at the screen this close-up and through strong lenses, the gaps between pixels are visible. In the original devkit, that felt like looking through a net. In the DK2, it's more like a veil; an ever-present film that distorts text and becomes especially hard to ignore when getting up close to things. The second is that the size of the screen and the lens-cups makes it feel like looking at the world through a scuba helmet, as well as the field of view being constrained by both black edges on your vision and often failing to hide the edges of the physical screen in front of you. Whether for CV1 or a later version, it really needs to either wrap around or find some way of smoothing out that effect.



Above Original VR ran on Amiga technology – 25MHz, 2MB RAM. They were mostly seen in arcades, with some VR centres like the Trocadero in London and Legend Quest in Nottingham.

Part of the issue is that the lenses are representing your eyes, but obviously the real ones still have freedom of movement and are drawn to movement, even though the VR experience at least currently demands you look straight ahead and physically turn your head.

Partly, that's a lack of eye-tracking. Mostly though, it's that the DK2 does a lot of processing to make the image better, including blurs and actively adding splashes of chromatic aberration for your eyes to filter. All this is based on your unique profile, which you set in advance, including distance from the screen and which of the two eye-cups you're using – A being for most →

BUNGIE'S DESTINY MAKES $500 MILLION WITHIN ITS FIRST 24 HOURS – ROUGHLY THE GAME'S BUDGET

THE BEST RIFT EXPERIENCES (SO FAR)

→ From science fiction to haulage simulation, Oculus Rift has been applied to a wide range of games already, but only a few really show off the best of what VR could deliver in coming years



ELITE: DANGEROUS

■ AT THE TIME of writing, the DK2 had only been in developer hands for about a month, but already there were plenty of great demos. If you can stomach another £50 to buy into the beta, by far the best is *Elite: Dangerous*. It's the whole package, with a sight-triggered UI, deep and beautiful space to explore, jaw-dropping star base interiors, and the ability to add in voice commands with a separate program.



EURO TRUCK SIMULATOR 2

■ BACK ON EARTH, *Euro Truck Simulator 2* may not be the most exciting game, but if you can drive, it's a great way to see how VR stimulates muscle memory and how quickly you forget that you're just sitting in front of a PC doing something mundane. You'll need to access the latest beta build on Steam.



SIGHTLINE

■ TO SEE SOMETHING more imaginative and how Oculus can amplify the atmosphere of a world, then *Sightline* is an absolute must. It's beautiful, it's creepy, it's surreal, with your gaze changing the world. It's best to go in not knowing much, and it can be unnerving. There are no jump-scares or overt horror elements though, making it the perfect demonstration for you and others.



RADIAL-G

■ NEXT, A GAME being developed with the Rift in mind: *Radial-G*. It's a blazingly fast Wipeout-style game played out over a spinning, churning tube that snakes through a sci-fi city. It's impressive, but also a good demonstration that you can have a whiplash-inducing game that won't make you sick all over your keyboard if the developers have taken the time to make it work properly.



MUSEUM OF GAMES

■ FINALLY, WHILE WE wait for official games of some of the biggest franchises currently doing the rounds, check out the *Museum Of Games* to see many famous game characters like you've never seen them before. The lighting and lack of motion aren't in their favour, but you can get a flavour for how they'll be when you meet them, and their friends, soon enough.

To find more demos, visit https://share.oculusvr.com. Unfortunately, apps do need to be at minimum recompiled for the DK2 and reworked to take advantage of features like positional tracking, so many older apps are no longer playable, or won't show it off to its full.

→ people, B for extremely short-sighted people. It is possible to wear glasses in the Rift, but not comfortable, and increases the risk of scratched lenses. After launch, we can expect prescription lenses to be available too, either from Oculus or third parties. It means that fairly exact positioning is required to get a crisp view, which isn't the easiest to maintain in-game.

The effect though, once configured, is amazing. A particularly fun demo called *Museum Of Games 2* features static models from many different games, from *Transformers* to gape up at to the *Arkham City* cast. To see someone standing in front of you that you've only previously seen action-figure sized on a screen is a strange experience; details like previously unnoticed tattoos popping, a whole new third-dimension brought out by the stereoscopic graphics to give them weight and heft. Walking up to, say, a Boomer from *Left 4 Dead*, you no longer just see a random bit of target practice; zombie bubble wrap, as it were. It's a giant; a pustular titan that towers high and deep enough to crush any survivor. Suddenly, you can appreciate what a nightmare it is; why the survivors all run. And there's far bigger than him out there.

It's these moments that define the VR experience – to some extent as a novelty, but in ways that go beyond that too. It's playing *Elite: Dangerous* and feeling a warm shiver when sunlight pours into your cockpit, or playing *Euro Truck Simulator* and realising you're just automatically checking your side-mirrors before pulling out, because that's how driving is done. In other cases though, VR subverts reality entirely. A great demo called *Sightline* is controlled entirely by head tracking – when you look away and look back, the world is different. A forest grows. A city rises. A room gets smaller and smaller and smaller… and then with a rush the walls are gone and you're floating in space with asteroids crashing and exploding all around. The feeling of acute claustrophobia and then infinite space is simply impossible to replicate on a screen; a whole world beyond cinematic 3D effects.

It's the less immediately impressive demos that really show off how advanced VR is becoming though, and in particular, positional tracking. Head-tracking was in the first version – up/down/side-to-side, much like the original VR headsets of the Nineties, and much as mouselook works in FPS games. The DK2 uses that too, but couples it with an IR webcam that can also track and compute more complex things like whether you're looking around the side of something, if you stand up, or track if you lean forwards.

One of the handiest examples is that in *Elite: Dangerous*, you bring up menus and statuses


US XBOX ONE SALES RISE BUT SONY'S PLAYSTATION 4 STILL RULES SUPREME IN THE CONSOLE WAR



Inset Alongside the Rift, others are working on technologies like the Omni treadmill, motion controls like the Hydra Razor and other ways to make the experience more real.



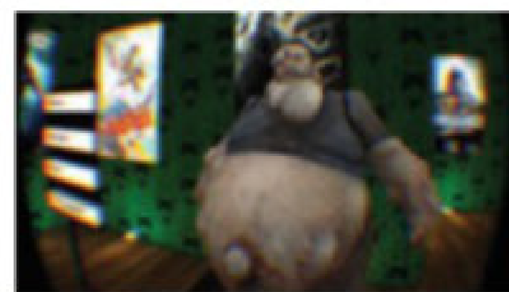
INJECTING VR

The games where VR doesn't work

■ OLDER GAMES like *Skyrim* and *BioShock Infinite* are never going to get official Rift support, but you can get them working to a point with a third-party injector like VorpX. This sits between you and the game, creating the stereoscopic view for the Rift, adding some in-game features to configure it, and for *Skyrim*, adding positional support. It's nowhere near as effective as having a game built for the Rift, and expect to face or painstakingly solve a few issues – in *Skyrim* for instance, your character's arms in first-person are huge. It's worth it to take a walk through places like Rapture though, if only briefly, and imagine when we'll see that level of game with immersion baked in from the start.

> "Suddenly, you can appreciate what a nightmare this monster is, why the survivors all run"

by simply glancing around your cockpit – top left, comms, left, galaxy map, right, systems. It's hard to read the text though, due to the veil effect and the low resolution, so your natural inclination is to peer in closer to see the text more clearly. With positional tracking, that actually works. So, in a horror game, you would peek out from behind a corner instead of having to physically step out into it. The camera can also track height, meaning that there's no reason a game couldn't detect you standing up and sitting down. As a bonus, the increased accuracy in mapping what you're doing with your head to the game also takes another big step to stopping motion sickness. Again, the current implementation isn't perfect, demanding far too much space between camera and player. The final version may not even use a camera at all. Once you've tried it though, there's no going back.



Above Thankfully, this one won't explode if you get too close to him.



Below Oculus is working with Samsung on its Gear VR headset. In exchange, it gets better components for its own equipment.

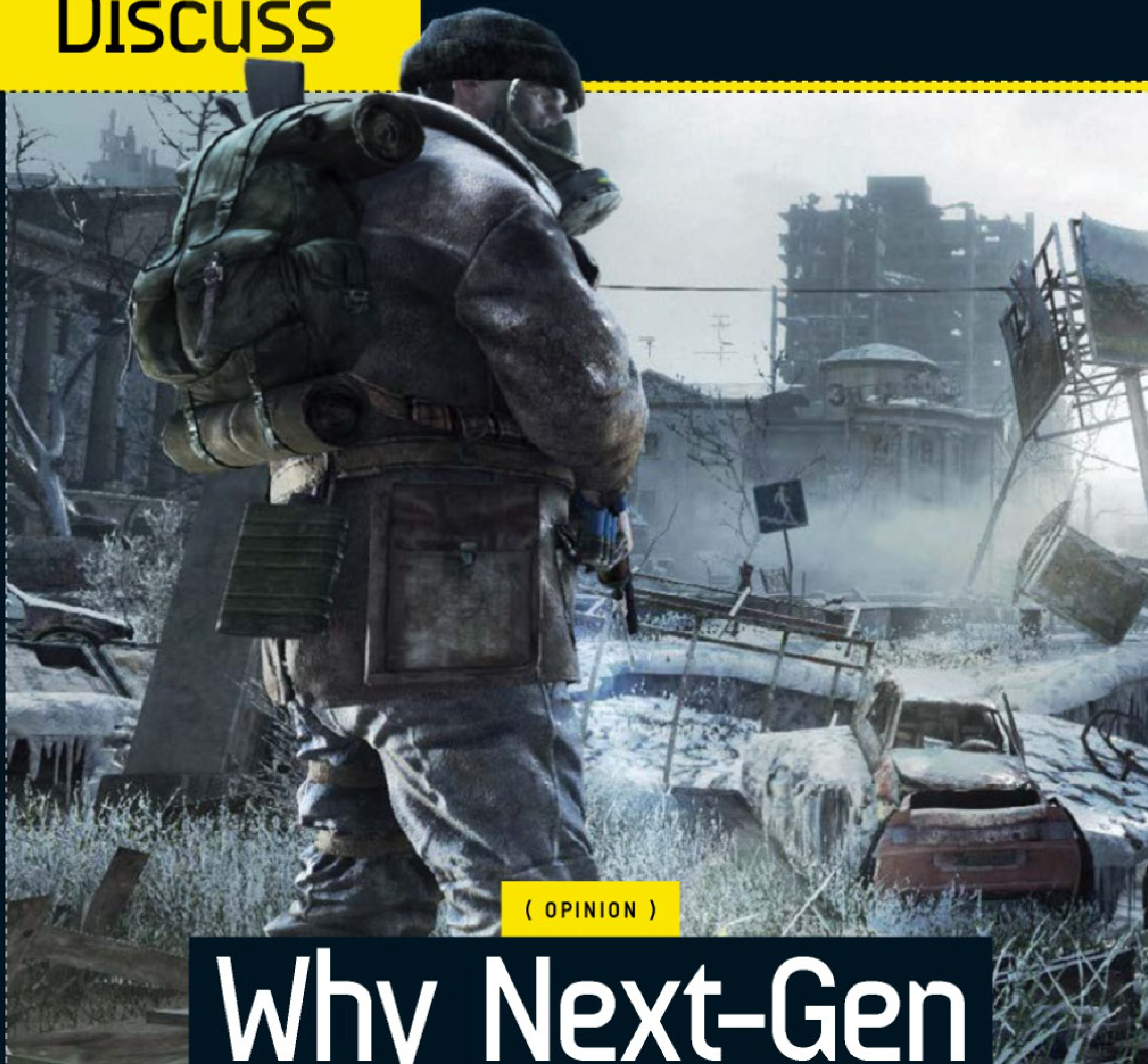
What even a few basic demos with the DK2 prove is that VR can do incredible things, for gaming and other experiences. An interactive hotel room on a TripAdvisor-type site where you can feel the size of the room. A 3D cinema (which can even provide 3D movie support without glasses!) to watch a streamed movie with friends. Avatar-based chat. One amazing recent example involves combining a real-world rollercoaster with a synchronised Rift experience so that riders feel like they're actually being dragged around a fantasy castle by a dragon.

The big sticking point for games though is that just taking a flat experience and sticking it in the headset won't work. The challenges are different, from controls (strafing is ridiculous in VR) to speed (fast is fine, but it has to be the *right* fast) to player controls (you can't look down to see the keys). As ever, the best idea is irrelevant if the market doesn't bite. Even then though, a big difference from the first crack at VR is that while it was ultimately tied to one company's fate, Virtuality, if Oculus fails, the use of off-the-shelf components and solutions to problems can still be picked up and re-used by others. Provided there's an interest in VR, there'll be home kits and hacks and enthusiasts still seeing what they can do with them, as well as projects to take them further – treadmills for movement, new controllers and more.

Ideally though of course, we're on the edge of a whole new revolution – a way to step in and experience games in ways we've never even imagined before. While we have to agree with Oculus VR that the DK2 isn't the kit to bring it to the world, much as we'd love to say it's ready, there's every reason to be excited for the first consumer version (expected, though not confirmed, for some time in 2015) likely priced somewhere between $200-400.



AFTER ATTRACTING A CULT FOLLOWING AND NOT A LOT MORE, SONY'S HOME ON PS3 IS CLOSING



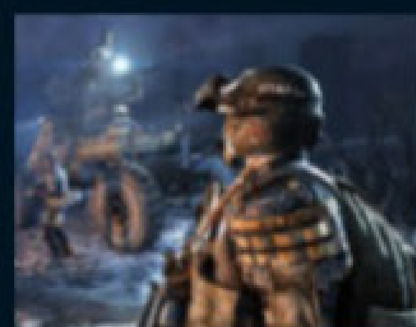
(OPINION)

Why Next-Gen Remakes Are Bad... For Now

→ The trend for re-issuing last-gen games on PlayStation 4 and Xbox One has attracted fierce criticism. We take a look at how developers can turn this into a positive for the whole industry

The sales charts in August were completely dominated by one game: *The Last Of Us: Remastered.* Naughty Dog's updated PlayStation 4 iteration of last year's PlayStation 3 triumph further energises an industry-wide trend for reissuing popular last-gen titles on Xbox One and PS4, and was only knocked from its perch by the re-release of *Diablo III: Reaper Of Souls Edition*.

This comes hot on the heels of similarly repackaged titles in *Tomb Raider: Definitive Edition* and *Rayman Legends*,



Above *Metro* didn't just improve the graphics substantially; it also tweaked AI and animations to make for a much smoother playing experience – particularly when it comes to *Metro 2033*.

and arrives before a veritable onslaught of more that include *Metro Redux*, *Grand Theft Auto V* and, if persistent rumours are to be believed, *Beyond: Two Souls*.

Unsurprisingly, this approach has generated a considerable amount of criticism. In lieu of significant, triple-a publisher-backed new-gen exclusives released on PlayStation 4 and Xbox One, early hardware adopters have bemoaned what they believe to be a cynical approach to making a fast buck from recycled software. But are they right to be aggravated? Is there an over-reliance on



Inset *The Last Of Us: Remastered* looks absolutely stunning, but is that enough to warrant PS3 owners double-dipping?

this next-gen upgrade business model? And why should we care about it so much?

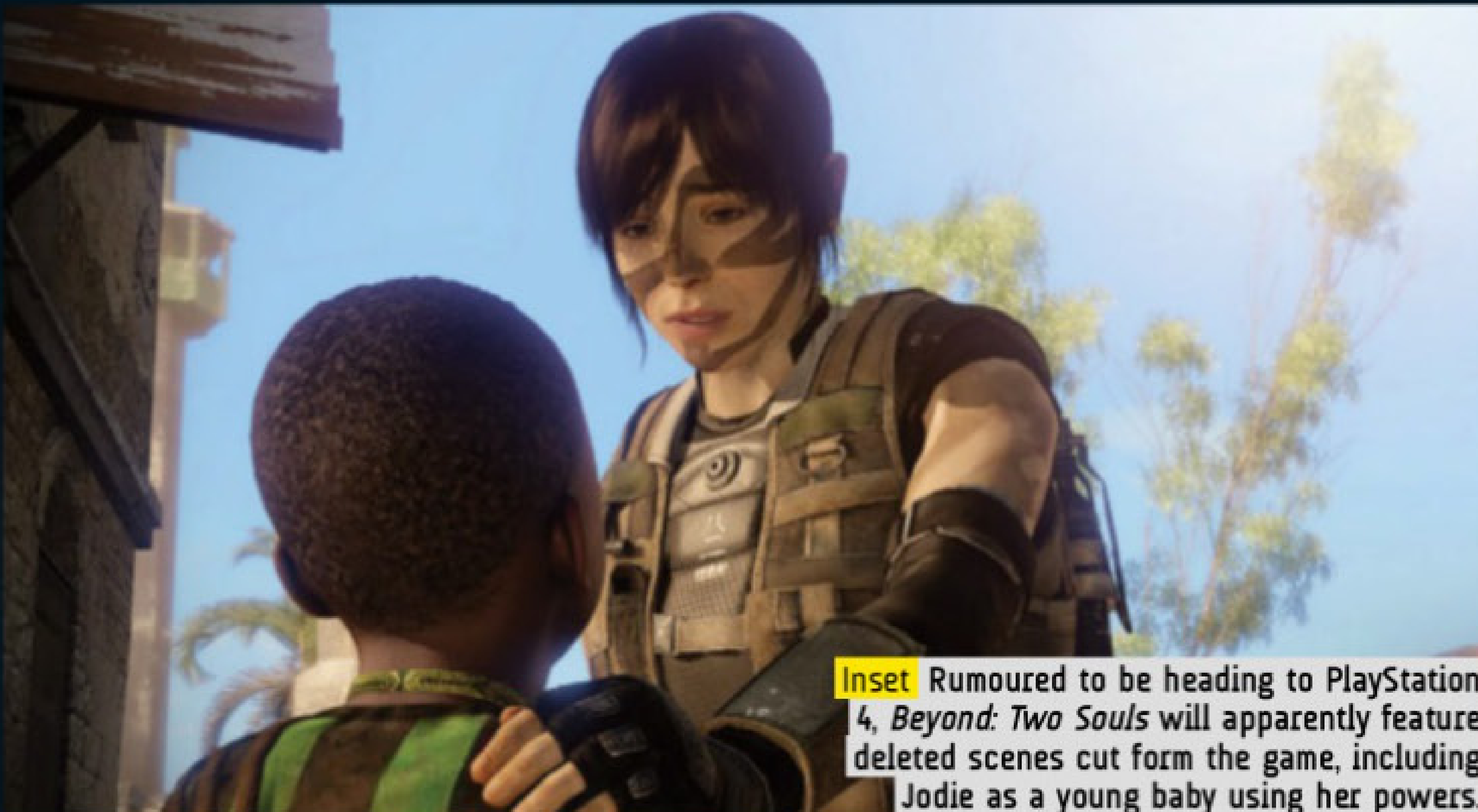
It's a question of value. There's a clear and damaging disparity in perception that exists between developers and consumers in not just how much these products cost, but what they are worth. *The Last Of Us: Remastered* on PS4 is retailing for around £35, which isn't much cheaper than the original on release, and offers improved graphics alongside previously released downloadable content. There's a clear saving to be made here given the volume of additional material that previously cost PS3 owners a premium. However, it's all existing content presented with a visual upgrade. It's a coup for PS4 owners who missed out during its original release, but what about those looking to double-dip? With the lack of backwards compatibility, loyal patrons deserve better, and there's a lack of meaningful incentive to revisit games on improved hardware.

No doubt that won't matter for some fans, and that's fine. It's one of the most popular games of all time, and looks better than ever. But we should expect more. Where are the deleted scenes? What about a new game mode, a behind-the-scenes documentary or an art book? At the moment, the passion is one-sided; the effort a little lazy.

IT'S NOT A new situation, of course. The last generation featured a collection of series remasters (*Splinter Cell*, *Tomb Raider*), not to mention particularly iconic titles like *Resident Evil* getting an update every few years to keep up its relevance. But there's something more immediate and immature about the current approach to the concept, and it appears that only a select few understand how to make it both sustainable for the industry and immediately gratifying for the gamer.

Metro Redux excelled in this regard. Not only does the combo pack offer both

→ NOTCH SAYS "IT'S NOT ABOUT THE MONEY. IT'S ABOUT MY SANITY," AFTER MICROSOFT BOUGHT MOJANG



Inset Rumoured to be heading to PlayStation 4, *Beyond: Two Souls* will apparently feature deleted scenes cut form the game, including Jodie as a young baby using her powers.

> "Loyal patrons deserve better and there's simply a lack of meaningful incentive to revisit games on improved hardware"

Metro games in 4A Games' underrated series of atmospheric shooters, but 4A Games has made important changes to both the gameplay and design to enhance the original experience, implementing new modes and features that change the game on a fundamental level.

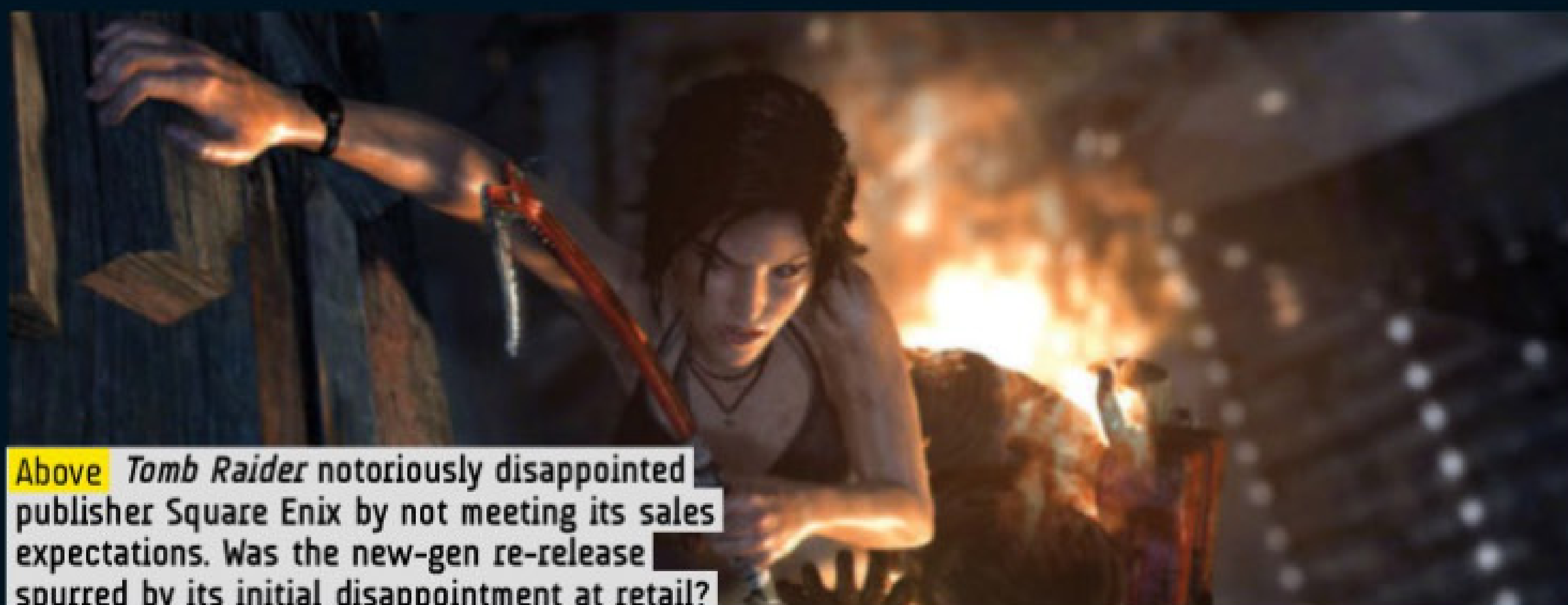
More importantly, it gave something back. For all those that spent hours soaking up the rich ambiance of 4A's bleak apocalyptic world, *Redux* delivered new and exciting features – an altered experience that refreshed the world.

The post-recession industry has suffered, with the inflated cost of development on newer platforms becoming a risk. Take the *Tomb Raider* reboot that, on its debut, was reported to have failed to meet the sales targets set by Square Enix. But given the popularity of the franchise and the demand for a sequel, a second opportunity at retail for Crystal Dynamics may have helped secure the funding needed to make *Rise Of The Tomb Raider* a viable financial investment.

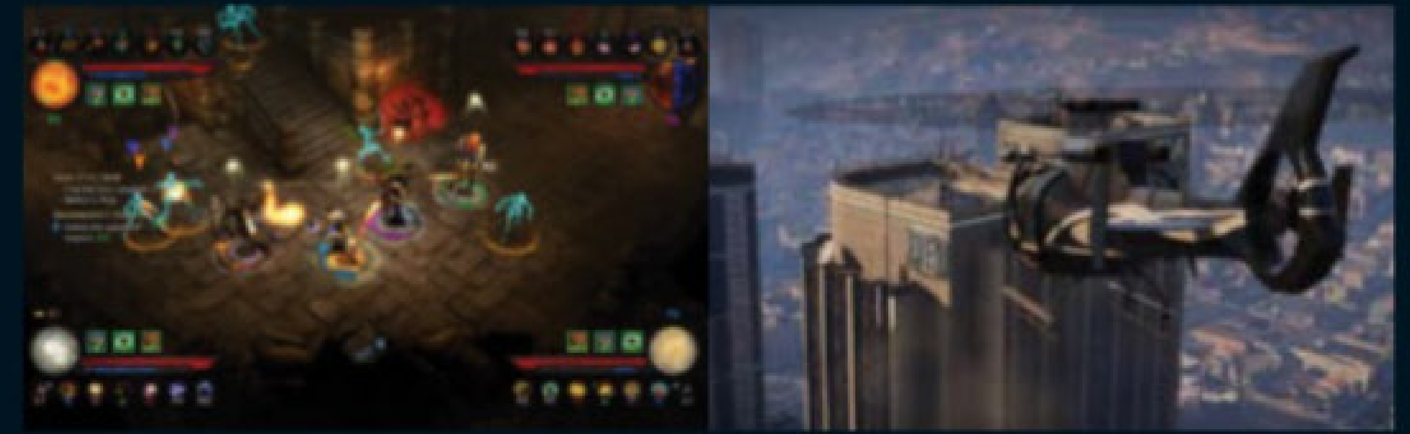
There's no denying that *Beyond: Two Souls* was a risk for Sony. It was a new platform for David Cage to explore the possibilities of interactive storytelling and subvert traditional videogame mechanics. If a successful re-release meant that Cage got another opportunity, isn't that something to rally around? What if *The Last Of Us: Remastered* didn't just help Naughty Dog make another *Uncharted*, but pushed them into developing another original tale set against the backdrop of another richly evocative world we've yet to see?

The challenge that lies ahead for developers is to not take their audience for granted. Fandom is one of the most powerful weapons on our industry's side, and rewarding those that wield it takes a lot more than some neat particle effects; it takes effort, resources and an appreciation from the people that inspired it in the first place. If we can get that right then this burgeoning trend could be a positive for everyone.



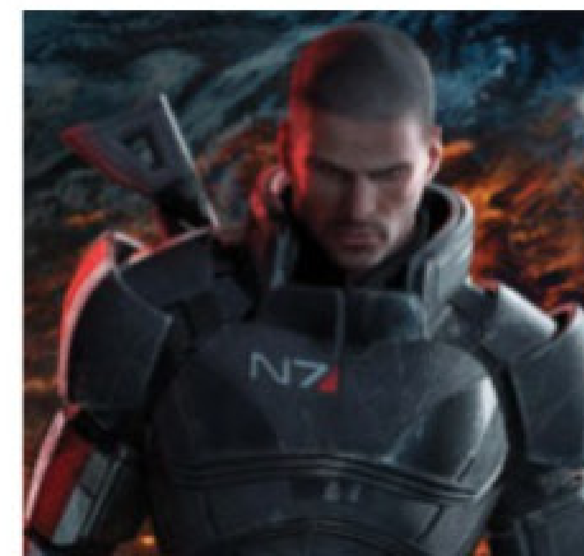


Above *Tomb Raider* notoriously disappointed publisher Square Enix by not meeting its sales expectations. Was the new-gen re-release spurred by its initial disappointment at retail?



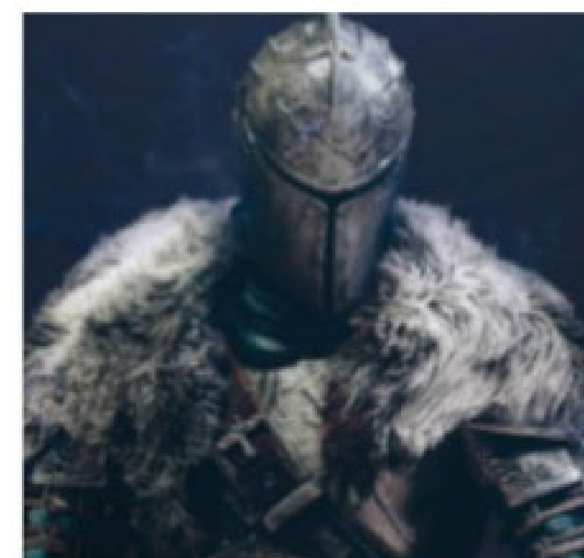
TIME FOR AN UPGRADE

Five last-gen games deserving of a new-gen revisit



MASS EFFECT TRILOGY

■ A release that is currently rumoured to be in the pipeline already. Not only was *Mass Effect* one of the finest-looking series on last-gen, but tweaks for continuity to the sprawling multi-game narrative would be a welcome enhancement.



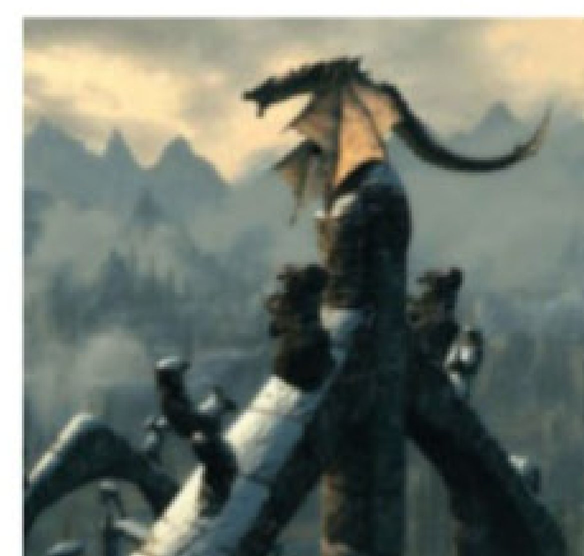
DEMON'S/DARK SOULS COLLECTION

■ One of the most celebrated franchises from the last gen, there was a litany of technical issues that impacted performance. With those tidied up and some enhanced difficulty, we'd brave the darkness once again.



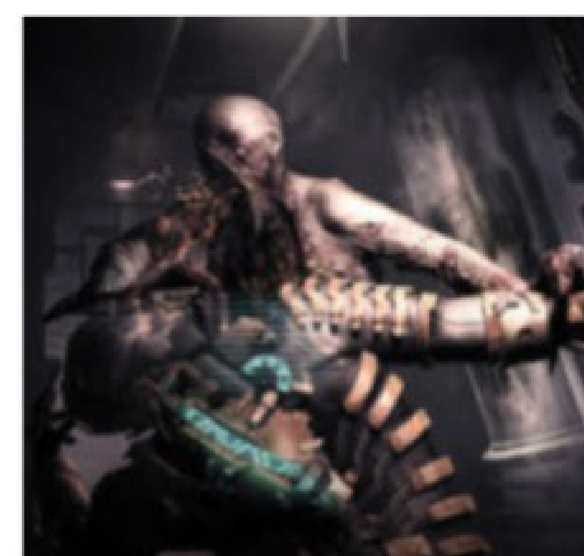
RED DEAD REDEMPTION

■ On a pure visual level, nothing matched *Red Dead* for art direction on the last-gen. With upgraded visuals on new hardware, Rockstar's Wild West would look breathtaking. May we suggest a director's cut that trims some of the fat?



THE ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM

■ Given the sheer passion that PC gamers have for upgrading *Skyrim*'s visuals to near-photorealistic quality, an Xbox One/PlayStation 4 re-release with a new paint job (plus all the DLC) would certainly placate console fans until the next entry.

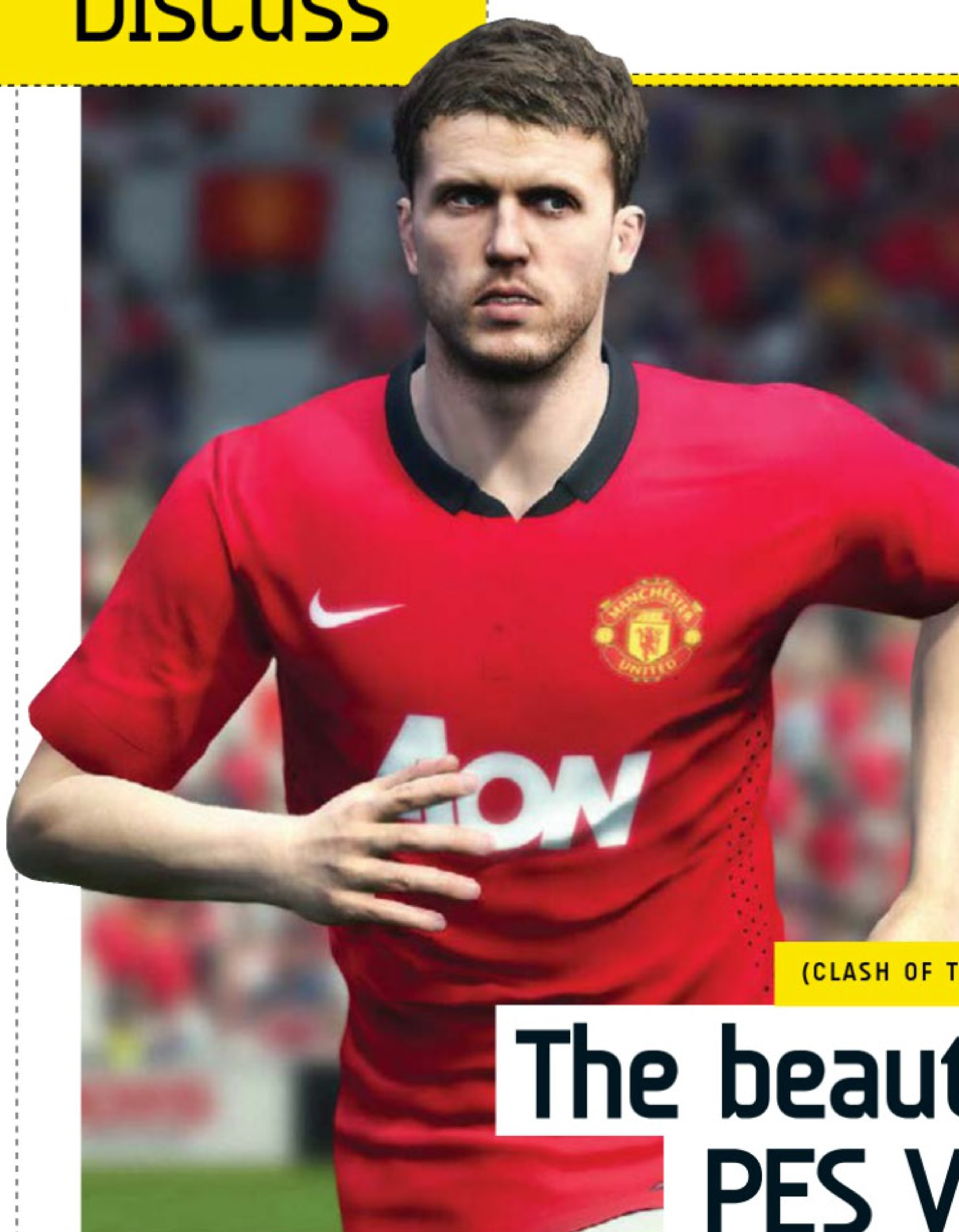


DEAD SPACE TRILOGY

■ While the franchise fizzled out with its last chapter, it was still one of the most chilling and intense action series of the past decade. If all three get a huge visual overhaul and some tweaked sound design then we could have the scariest games of all time.

AFTER SEVEN YEARS IN DEVELOPMENT, BLIZZARD HAS CANCELLED ITS MMO TITAN, A FOLLOW UP TO WOW







(CLASH OF THE TITANS)

The beautiful game PES Vs FIFA

→ Since 2000, EA's yearly juggernaut has won the sales war against Konami. In the wake of the rivals' launch this year, we thought we'd level the playing field and ask the developers behind both games the same questions…

How has the community influenced the development process of this year's games?

Sebastian Enrique, EA, producer
A lot of our new features this year have come from the community – for example, our goalkeepers have been the subject of criticism every year. Going through the forums, looking online, you'd see people just saying "fix the keepers, fix the keepers, fix the keepers." We had a vision for the keepers that we couldn't do [last-gen]: we didn't have the processing power, we didn't have the memory. The keeper is one of the most difficult positions to build the AI for, so when we got to know [the PS4 and Xbox One], we started re-working the keepers right away. Right now, we're finally at a state where they're ready – the community asked for it, and we supplied.

Adam Bhatti, Konami, PES European Brand Manager
Our focus is gameplay. I truly believe, and this might be me wearing rose-tinted glasses, that *PES 5* and *PES 6* are still truly great football games, and that they were truly stunning for their time. They are timeless games. Basically, I just want the fans to stop saying to us that "*PES 5* and *6* are the best *PES* games ever," because it's been a while since those were released, and we really want to put those games into history and move forward and bring out a new *PES* game that is considered the best ever.


Above *FIFA* producer Sebastian Enrique says that many new features have come from the community.

What has been done to improve the responsiveness of the game on the new generation of hardware?

Sebastian Enrique, EA, producer
Responsiveness, this year, was the one thing we wanted to improve over any other. To do that, you need to break down lots of games elements: locomotion, get-ups, animations; I can give you a list, but it will never be comprehensive. Because we have all different age groups playing the game, and different people from all over the world, we also needed to make sure we made the game presentable to everyone. The graphics have taken a huge leap forward, and we've made it so everyone – from people who play it [professionally] to people that get together with friends on a Friday night – can enjoy *FIFA 15* in the same way.

Adam Bhatti, Konami, PES European Brand Manager
Making you feel as though you have total control is the most important thing, allowing you to feel that the gameplay's responsive and instinctive, and that every game is different. We can't just take *PES 5* and *6*, make them HD and charge £50; we have to do much more than that, but we have to look at the key elements that made those games so special.

PES has always been known for its quality of movement, too. That's something we've been working hard to get right in *PES 2015*.


WASTELAND 2 KICKS OFF BIG WITH 1.5 MILLION COPIES SOLD IN JUST ITS FIRST 24 HOURS ON SALE


Inset Both games this year have worked hard on creating more emotion on the pitch.

> "We look at PES like we look at Assassin's Creed, Call Of Duty and Battlefield. You can learn things from any game"
> Sebastian Enrique, EA, producer

How do you gather data for each player in the game?

Sebastian Enrique, EA, producer
We have an army of around 2,000 people located in numerous places in the world, and they go to every match you can imagine. They are experts on their own particular league – some of which are reviewers and some are aiders. The reviewers will watch matches and, over time, give out attributes depending on a player's aptitude [in different areas].

Our team in Cologne then runs software that balances it all out because, obviously, the stats in the Premier League will have to be better than those in the Colombian League, for example. We make sure all the players are balanced, all the leagues are balanced, and it's a lot of statistics to decide on. And the work doesn't stop there – we keep on updating it even after we ship.

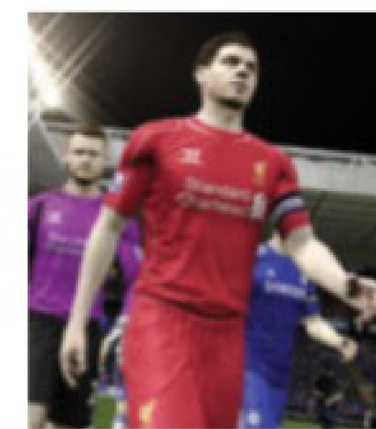
Klaus Garner, Konami, assistant producer
This year, we're crowd-sourcing all of the content relating to players and teams from local football experts around the world. We have given [Mario] Götze a 'ball control' stat of 94, 'finishing' 84, 'dribbling' 90, 'short passing' 88 and 'passing technique' 90. All of these stats have been deciphered from real data from his performances last season. He's not great at everything though, so his stats for jumping, tackling etc are not very good.

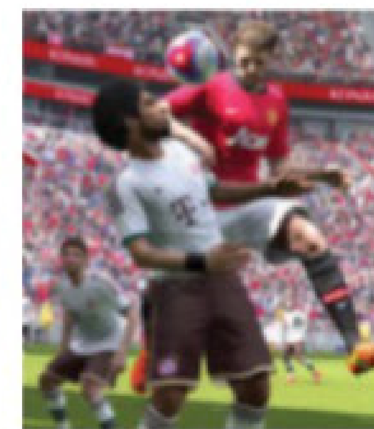
For the first time in a football game, we have different strategies for home and away teams, so your team will play a different kind of football depending on whether they're home or away. A lot of teams play a lot deeper when playing away, so you'll see that in the game, too.

How do you differentiate yourself from your rival franchise?

Sebastian Enrique, EA, producer
I've been working with *FIFA* for more than nine years. The public and the critics were saying 'Oh, *FIFA*'s a good game, but *PES* is a great game' back then. When we transitioned to PS3 and X360, we had a strong vision of what we wanted the game to be – it was *FIFA 10* that really changed the loyalties of some people.

We look at *PES* like we look at *Assassin's Creed*, *Call Of Duty* and *Battlefield*. You can learn things from any game. We look after our own house: if I know I have to fix the ceiling, I don't want to know about how good the ceiling next door is. I respect Konami, I respect *PES*, and I know how hard it is to make a good football game, so I hope they do well, because then we have more competition, and that's something else that can push us forward!


Above *FIFA*'s licensing deals remain a strong point for the game.


Below *PES* will be hoping greater fluidity wins out this year.

Klaus Garner, Konami, assistant producer
We have a game that lets you play real football; you can play counter-attacking, possession, long-ball... which you can't do in [*FIFA*], where it's more like ping-pong.

Adam Bhatti, Konami, PES European Brand Manager
FIFA is all about scoring goals, they want to get you to that moment. That's not a bad thing, a lot of people just want to be able to score goals and have their lobbed-through ball work every time.

The thing with *PES* is this... in the past we've made a mistake in trying to be known as the connoisseur's football game. We still are that, I think we've proved that with our understanding of the sport . At the same time as being the connoisseur's game we don't want to end up excluding people.





Inset *PES* is giving *FIFA* a two month head start, but the break may work in its favour.

→ UNITED FRONT GAMES HAS CONFIRMED TRIAD WARS IS AN ONLINE EXPANSION TO SLEEPING DOGS



KONGETSU

MOBILE MARKET

Don't Call It A Comeback

Slowly but surely, Japan is coming around to the idea of a new generation. The mobile market will clearly remain a vital chunk of the industry, but this fresh injection of enthusiasm might just be what the next-gen consoles need.

It might have taken a little money from platform holders to get the key third-parties on board but now, more and more Japanese teams are waking up to the reality of the global market – PS4 is smashing the records set by its predecessors, Xbox One has recovered admirably from its shaky start and Wii U just continues to prove that Nintendo can get by on the strength of its first-party line-up alone, while sales figures for PS3 and 360 releases show the bottom dropping out of the past-gen market at a staggering rate. On a purely domestic level, Japanese developers could have stuck with the established past-gen scene and seen some kind of return, but it would have crippled new games on the global stage, in markets that count for ten times the potential sales of the home turf.

> Persona 5 may no longer have the honour of being the last great PS3 exclusive

And that's the kicker. Relatively low overheads on development on consoles that have been kicking around for the best part of a decade meant that PS3 exclusives could be tailored for and released purely to Japanese audiences. But with this generation's higher production costs comes a need, at least in the generation's infancy while new tech is established, to sell globally to recoup spending and turn a profit. With paid exclusives and major players blazing a trail towards mass uptake on new consoles, this in turn will help sales of the hardware in Japan and encourage even more devs to get on board. This is the turning point, people. It only gets better from here. And with the release schedule promising a golden age of gaming early next year, Japan couldn't have picked a better time to realise that these new consoles, despite relatively low domestic interest, are *definitely* where the action is at.



I discussed the idea last issue that Japan could be in the process of transitioning away from mainstream console gaming in favour of the handheld and mobile market, and then what happens? The Tokyo Game Show comes along, bringing with it a selection of incredible major console releases, a bundle of exciting release dates and a plateful of my own words. They tasted inky, for what it's worth.

While it's not exactly a sure sign that all is well in Japanese development, impressive showings for the likes of *MGS V*, *Bloodborne* and *Final Fantasy XV* plus reveals of new games like *Disgaea 5* and *Dragon Quest Heroes* show cracks in the industry's defiance in embracing a new generation. *Persona 5* may no longer have the honour of being the last great PS3 exclusive, although it is now in with a shot at the title of 'first must-have PS4 RPG'.

Luke Albigés is Deputy Editor of **Play** magazine, a lover of all things Japanese and glad to see some incredible talent back at the forefront of gaming



● Need further proof that Japan may finally be sold on the new generation? PS4 at last has its first JRPG and while the first few on any given system never tend to be up to much (sit down, *Suikoden*, everyone knows you're the exception), it's at the very least a promising sign. Expect: typical anime RPG fare, gratuitous camera angles and an evil force known curiously as the Beep. Don't expect: a western release any time soon.

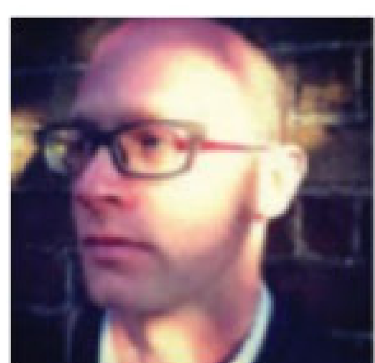


ROOM WITH A VIEW

With The Chinese Room's Dan Pinchbeck



Tackling the giant hula hoop in the room



There's been a bit of a battle of wills here recently in the TCR household. Our soon-to-be 11 year old wants to play *Halo*. His best friend, who is 13, loves *Halo*. I love *Halo* and I think he'd love it too. But *Halo* is a 16. It's an age-old parenting debate really, and we've taken the hard line, like most of the game dev parents we know.

If *Combat Evolved* went through PEGI now, it'd probably come out as a 12. We all know that ratings are often co-opted as a marketing tool, with titles pitched above and below the 16 mark depending on where current trends are pointing. And, as I've said here before, in reality you get far more grim content per minute in the average film compared to many games of an equivalent rating. In the meantime, *Mass Effect* is fine, as a 12, and that's the kind of smart, well-designed game I want him to enjoy, rather than reaching for god-awful junk like *Duke Nukem Forever* just because it's an 18 (and 18s are better than 12s because, well, they're 18s so they are, like, 6 better, which is a brilliant Spinal Tap argument that I swear I've actually heard someone use).

> Do I think there's stuff in GTA V that kids shouldn't be exposed to? Yeah, actually, but I also think there's stuff in GTA V that, in a perfect world, no-one should be exposed to

His frustration comes from the number of kids his age who are now happily playing *GTA V* and *Call Of Duty*, often with their dads. This really, really makes me angry. It's not a puritanical thing – when I was a kid, we were sneaking off to watch *Evil Dead* and *I Spit On Your Grave* – it's more about the principal. Do I think there's stuff in *GTA V* that kids shouldn't be exposed to? Yeah, actually, but I also think there's stuff in *GTA V* which, in a perfect world, no-one should be exposed to, especially the ones who think rape is an acceptable form of entertainment. For me, it's as much about the right for teenagers to break taboos and find their own spaces for rebelling against their parents. Young people should be sneaking off and doing things their parents don't want them to, it's a critically important part of growing into an adult and finding your independence. As a parent, it's one of the hardest things you have to accept your kids are going to do. So in a way, I really object to the parent-to-child 'man up, son' idea behind buying a pre-teen *GTA V* or *COD* because sneaking around behind your parent's back watching, reading, playing media they don't approve of is part of being a teenager.

This is one of those horrible modern kidult things where middle-aged folk like me need to back off out of the cultural space reserved for young people, admit we're not young anymore and stop trying to buy our cool back by muscling in on the teenage rebellion. It makes you less of a man (if that's what bothers you) if you're using *COD* or *GTA* or whatever to teach your boy to be one. Be a parent, back off and let them learn it themselves. Take the hit of them thinking you're a sad old middle aged loser who doesn't get where the cool kids are all at these days, and do what parents are supposed to do: make the unpopular decisions in their best interests.



Going behind your parents' backs and gaining access to mature media is a part of adolescence.

Dan Pinchbeck is the creative director at The Chinese Room, currently working on Everybody's Gone To The Rapture. His views aren't necessarily representative of games™

Five Things About

Sunset Overdrive

Insomniac Games has left the comfort of Sony's bosom and migrated to Microsoft for its anarchic Xbox One exclusive shooter, *Sunset Overdrive*. If there's one developer that knows a little about packing a hefty arsenal then its Insomniac, so games™ tracks down James Stevenson, community lead at the studio, to talk about the secrets behind its sugar-pop blast of a game

1 The game used to look more like a cartoon…

"Early on the game was even more stylised like Gorillaz or something like that but we scaled back to something a little more realistic. That design process was a year-long to nail down where we were and it was dumping a whole bunch of ideas on the table and our art director managed to get that cohesive. It took a long time to get it to look and feel like how we wanted it to."

2 Building the world was the biggest challenge…

"Knowing how to communicate what you can grind on and colours that distinguish interactive elements, it was a real iterative process making sure we manage to get that visual language right. We ended up re-building the entire city like three of four times. It started off very flat compared to how it ended up as a very vertical, dense and traversal-orientated world."

3 Its enemies are unrelenting…

"The hardest challenge was making enemies that didn't just work on a single plane. When you get into the latter half of the game, it's really vertical and skyscraper-based and fighting security robots (sent to wipe all the evidence – including you), they'll jump up and down with you, chase you on multiple levels and follow you around with ranged attacks."

4 It wears its influences on its sleeve…

"*DmC* and *Tony Hawk* were big inspirations. Early on, we were asking 'How do we encourage players to play with style?' So we put in a meter system to think about combos, then we added the Amp powers into it so they keep doing combos. You want to keep it going as there's explosions, blood and overcharge all over the place. We've said before that *Peggle* was an influence in keeping the player visually engaged."

5 It was originally a completely different game…

"It wasn't originally a traversal game. In fact, it wasn't originally a crazy weapon game. At one point we were like 'We should have more realistic weapons.' But then as we added the rail grinding, we started adding layers and when we got the combat working with it, then it all really clicked and realised the potential of what we had."



Gaming's scariest moments

→ After playing through P.T, the games™ team has been huddled in blankets on the floor, lit only by torchlight, discussing the most horrific things that have ever happened to us in gaming. Eventually, we got too freaked out and had to go and play some Hohokum to calm down, but we thought why not pass the horror onto you…

■ Many years ago I bought *Eternal Darkness* right about the same time I splashed out on a top-end surround sound system to plug my Gamecube into. At around midnight, on the night I decided to start playing it, I started to hear a baby crying… It freaked me out as I couldn't work out where it was coming from and I knew my neighbours didn't have kids. Relief took over as I finally twigged it was the game messing about with me…
Jon Preece, Facebook

■ *Batman Arkham Asylum.* I played six hours straight when suddenly the screen froze. I brought it used thought it was broken, I was relieved when I realised it was just the Scarecrow. Never have I squeezed my controller so tightly in frustration than that moment!
@ImClintEastwood, Twitter

■ The opening hour of *Dead Space.* A master class in nerve-shredding suspense and creepy sound design. Shat myself.
@RichJimMurph, Twitter

■ Playing *Condemned*, I was searching an abandoned train station for health and weapons. I climbed aboard an old train when I heard a noise, I checked out the window and saw an old homeless guy, thought nothing of it, then suddenly I spotted a figure walking towards him wearing a yellow rain mac with the hood up. I waited and watched him approach the homeless guy, when yellow mac started beating the living daylights out of the homeless guy with a baseball bat. I'm still sat there watching, the homeless guy went limp, then – oh my god – he turned round and stared right at me. I froze with fear, and then ran like hell…
Stuart Johnson, Facebook

■ Probably the dogs leaping through the window in the first *Resident Evil*. I knew it was coming, yet it still made me jump.
@gamesasylum, Twitter

■ *Aliens Vs Predator* on PC (1999), playing as a marine and having a facehugger leap onto your screen and kill you.
@the_spad, Twitter

■ Was playing *Resident Evil 4* and about to do the maze when the lightbulb in my room fell out and nearly hit me in the head.
@Jokesound, Twitter



THE SAVIOUR OF XBOX

HALO

UNCOVERING THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF MASTER CHIEF

***Halo* is more than a game series. It's more than a Microsoft exclusive IP. It's more than a first-person shooter.** *Halo* is a landmark, a permanent installation in the culture of gaming. The iconic and imposing silhouette of Master Chief stands above everything Microsoft has achieved since launching its first games console – without Chief and the visionary studio behind him, the Xbox would have remained an outsider, an idea, an *other*.

In 2001, *Halo* did more than just revolutionise the first-person shooter; it validated an entire generation of uncertain hardware. The Xbox was seen as an outside force, a predator on the fringes of Sony and Nintendo's domain. And yet, five months after the game's launch, it broke records – the fastest-selling game of the sixth console generation, boosting the Xbox's sales by over 50 per cent in the process.

A previously little-known developer called Bungie had catapulted the Xbox and the first-person shooter to dizzying heights, setting a new standard for the genre on both PC and console. *Halo* revolutionised a stagnating genre, it proved that games didn't have to take themselves so seriously all the time. It proved that competitive player-on-player shooting could work on console, and it laid the foundations for one of the most complete and engrossing sci-fi worlds in fiction, let alone videogames.

Halo was born in 2001, but that was just the beginning. In a celebration of one of the most successful franchises our industry has ever seen, **games™** has tracked down the creators and visionaries behind each instalment of the epic *Halo* saga and formed a comprehensive guide to *Halo*'s past, present and future. »

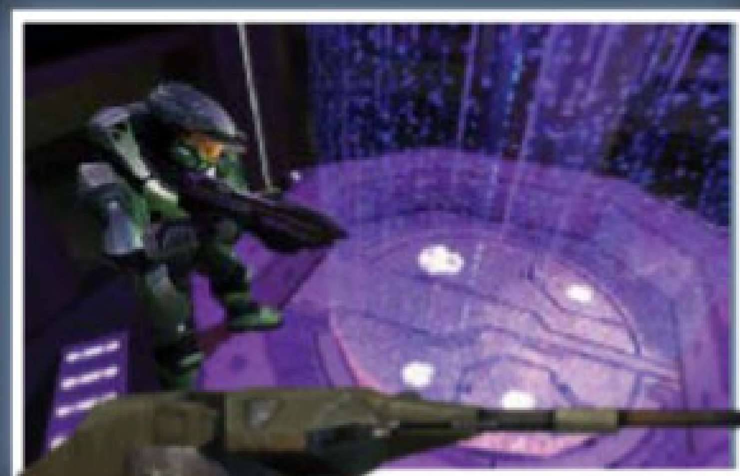
HALO
COMBAT EVOLVED

THE GAME THAT PROVED FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS WERE HERE TO STAY ON CONSOLES, HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED WAS A BREAKTHROUGH TITLE FOR MICROSOFT'S INFANT XBOX PLATFORM. INNOVATIVE AND BREATHTAKINGLY ORCHESTRATED, HALO'S BIRTH WAS THE RESULT OF A GROWING BUNGIE TEAM'S INSISTENCE ON 'MAKING SOMETHING GREAT'...

Year: 2001 **System:** Xbox



Halo exploded on to the scene in 2001, launching its fledgling console, the original Xbox, into the business.





***Halo* was more than an innovation in first-person shooters,** it was a clarification," explains Jaime Griesemer, designer on *Combat Evolved*. "It was a simplification, or a purification. Because of the restrictions we had on the Xbox hardware, we had to get rid of a lot of elements that weren't really that important to us for an FPS."

Halo reinvented the first-person shooter, stripping it back from the PC format – excessive loadouts were replaced with a two-weapon system, and the control scheme overhauled completely from genre rivals to fit the hefty Xbox pad. *Halo* proved that the FPS was a console-friendly genre, and all it took was Master Chief and his aptitude with weapons to frame that in a way gamers would understand. It was a marriage of mechanics and narrative that empowered players, and justified Bungie's removal of a weapon wheel – something that was initially done only because the original Xbox didn't have enough memory to allow Chief to have a whole arsenal on him at any one time.

"The main goal with Chief as a character was that he always had the ability to use the tools at his disposal well enough that he could accomplish any of his objectives," says Griesemer. "That meant we could put you in situations where you had a limited inventory, but make each thing you could carry potent enough to win any firefight. No combination of weapons would put you at a dead end."

This new restrictive system was merged with a new kind of open level design that first-person shooters hadn't really seen before. Rather than just ushering you from point A to point B, *Halo* created sandboxes for you to explore, and populated them with AI that understood how to take advantage of these open spaces; another first for the genre. Halo's alien-yet-familiar vistas and sprawling open landscapes have come to define the series – and Bungie's design ethic – and were inspired by Microsoft's acquisition of the Bungie studio.

"During the early days of *Halo*, we were based in Chicago," explains *Combat Evolved*'s art director Marcus Lehto, "then when Microsoft purchased us, we moved out to the Pacific area – out to Seattle. When we got here, we were struck by the amazing beauty of the Cascade mountains, the ocean mouth, the sheer cliff walls, the waterfalls, the peninsula out here... that all massively influenced *Halo*, even down to the exploration. We put the player into – basically – a giant national park, to all intents and purposes, and we wanted them to explore this giant natural wonderland."

These beautiful levels went against the grain at the time. Whereas a lot of other games in the genre were built around earthy, dark colour

palettes, *Halo* was colourful and bright; spiritually reminiscent of the 3D-platformers that were dominating the industry a decade before – something that came into play in the verticality of the levels, and gave birth to the now-famous '*Halo* jump'.

The level design we were after gave us a lot of geometry to play with," explains Griesemer. "And the funny thing is, all the physics in *Halo* are completely accurate to Earth's gravity – the reason they feel 'floaty' is because the camera's attached to the top of Chief's head: if you're eight and a half feet tall, that's how it's going to feel when you leap into the air. We couldn't tune that jump later on in development because by then we'd already designed all these platforms you needed to get on to progress through the game."

It could be argued that the '*Halo* jump' was a happy accident, then – another tool in the evolving skillset Chief was collecting, another facet that gilded the *Halo* experience with player empowerment, and granting the game a fun factor that console players hadn't really experienced in a shooter before. The enemy forces in the game – the Covenant – galvanised that less-than-serious feeling, too: the dwarf Grunts were the game's main cannon fodder, yet were oddly comical – a distinct contrast to their overtly religious-cum-insectoid design.

"I'm a preacher kid," explains Lehto, who came up with the original concept of the Covenant. "I lived in a church growing up, and I saw the good side of organised religion and the bad side of it. Fundamentalism in any shape or form can be very dangerous, and we wanted to explore how that can translate into an alien culture and belief system." Pairing serious and socially critical themes –which are explored in the game's winding canon – with the in-game zaniness of what the AI could do was another fresh breath of air that Bungie breathed into the stagnating genre.

"Shortly after *Halo: CE* came out – around the time of the [DC sniper] – a news programme showed a video from *Halo*, selling it as some kind of murder simulator," Griesemer tells us, "but if you knew *Halo* at all, you could tell it was just footage of this Grunt doing something goofy – *Halo* was not a dark, gritty experience and in a time where a lot of other titles were pessimistic, *Halo* told the story of humanity resisting, overcoming and *achieving* – it was something that resonated with a lot of people, and I hope one day we see more games turn back in that direction."



"HALO IS BASICALLY A GIANT NATIONAL PARK, AND WE WANTED PLAYERS TO EXPLORE THIS GIANT NATURAL WONDERLAND"

MARCUS LEHTO, ART DIRECTOR, HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED



INTERVIEW

STEVE DOWNES

GAMES™ SPEAKS TO THE VOICE OF MASTER CHIEF



How did you first become involved with Bungie and the *Halo* franchise?
Bungie was originally based in Chicago, where I do my morning radio show on 97.1 WDRV "The DRIVE". Marty O'Donnell was a fan and asked me to do the voice of a character for a game he was working on called "Septera Core". About a year later he called me back to do the voice of Master Chief for their next game: *Halo*.



What's the *Halo* journey been like over the last decade?
The Chief has been on an amazing and challenging journey. One that I doubt even he expected. Certainly I didn't. He is obviously the strong silent type; he discovered that his strength, weaponry and skills on the battlefield would not be all he would need to see him through.

You weren't a gamer when you signed up to play Chief, has that changed?
No. It's good to know what you're good at and what you're not good at. And I learned early on that I would not be able to devote the time and energy necessary to be a good gamer. And I decided that if I couldn't be really good at it, I didn't want to play at all. I have the highest regard for those gamers out there who are accomplished. My interest in *Halo* has always been the story.

If Master Chief and Agent Locke (from *Halo 5*) walked into a bar and engaged in a fistfight, who would come out on top?
... Master Chief *always* finishes the fight.

PERFECTING THE FORMULA

Halo 2 didn't just introduce online functionality to *Halo* – it also brought smarter AI, new weapons and a pacier, more streamlined rhythm to how the game played. "*Halo 2* was closer to what we originally planned," reveals Jaime Griesemer – who was lead designer by the time *Halo 2* was in development. "*Halo 2* was a much quicker game – and I think that was a reaction to the direction shooters were going at that time. *Halo 2* sped up: people were getting better with controllers, and internet multiplayer required us to think more about how fast your shields recharged, and reload speeds and all that. We actually started designing the multiplayer first, which I think affected the game quite a lot."

Year: 2004 **System:** Xbox

HALO 2

WE LOOK DEEPER INTO JUST HOW BUNGIE CHANGED ONLINE MULTIPLAYER FOREVER

***Halo 2* was proof that a strong, online network could exist on a console.** Max Hoberman – who worked on the original iteration of *Halo 2* for Bungie, and recently the *Master Chief Collection*'s multiplayer as president of Certain Affinity – explains the process behind its conception.

What were the main things to consider when developing for this new online platform?
When we started on *Halo 2*, there was an opportunity to help shape the future of the Xbox Live service. As with all our work, we wanted to make sure that all of the online features that we requested support for were framed in a manner that would be broadly useful to other games. We were able to incorporate our dream features such as an instantly available friends list, matchmaking, rankings, and parties. These were ultimately broadly adopted by the Xbox Live team.

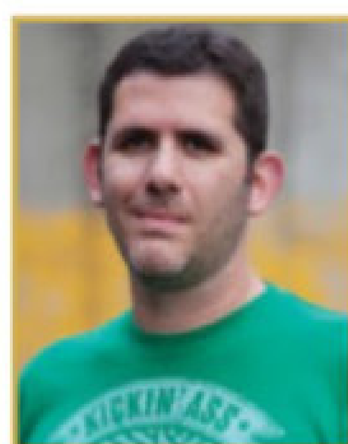
Was the team ever sceptical about trying to make online multiplayer on console as big as PC?
We always had a high level of confidence that *Halo 2*'s gameplay would attract a huge audience. Still, there was some trepidation inside of Bungie about the path that we'd chosen to take. The biggest point of contention was around our idea for a simple, automated matchmaking system - many long-time PC gamers reeled at the idea of giving up so much player control, and very vocally voiced their opinion that this would be rejected by players. This continued until we shipped and our big bet proved itself.

***Halo 2* has some of the most famous map design - what's your personal favourite and why?**
Halo 2 has amazing maps! My personal all-time favourite is Lockout - it's the perfect combination small-scale, fast-paced map, supporting ninja-like movement and expert grenade tosses (my best weapon!).

We've heard you were one of two people working on *Halo 2*'s multiplayer?
When I started on *Halo 2*, Chris Carney, a very talented environment art lead, and I were the only people dedicated to multiplayer. My team also had a dedicated UI artist and a dedicated UI programmer, and then we got spare cycles here and there from other programmers. This was a blessing in disguise – a smaller team allowed us to hyper-focus, eliminating any room for error and ultimately getting it right the first time around. This is a big part of why I am such a meticulous planner, and this planning paid off in the long run.

What did *Halo 2*'s multiplayer achieve that you're the most proud of?
As far as I'm concerned, *Halo 2* multiplayer did two things exceptionally well: first, it helped raise *Halo* to the position of "king of the multiplayer hill." Nothing could touch the popularity of the franchise for years, and this cemented the game as a fixture for multiplayer FPS gaming (including among the competitive crowd, which was unheard of for a console game at the time).

Second, it paved the way for the Xbox Live service as we know it and an entire generation of multiplayer games on console. Neither is a small feat, and I'd be hard pressed to say which I'm more proud of.



"THE BIGGEST POINT OF CONTENTION WAS AROUND OUR IDEA FOR A SIMPLE, AUTOMATED MATCHMAKING SYSTEM"
MAX HOBERMAN, PRESIDENT, CERTAIN AFFINITY

Year: 2007 **System:** Xbox 360

HALO 3

THE GAME THAT SECURED THE XBOX 360'S DOMINANCE IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE 360/PS3 WAR, HALO 3 PUSHED THE THEN-NEW HARDWARE TO ITS LIMIT…

"We really spanked the 360," laughs Marcus Lehto – art director on the game. "I don't think we could have pushed that hardware any further than we did, otherwise it would have started smoking on your table. We juiced it. It was good."

Halo 3 was released to an audience of gamers that were becoming dissatisfied with the new generation of hardware – nothing much had been done to prove the 360 and PS3 were pushing boundaries. It was still early in the console's life cycle, and it seemed Microsoft was getting nervous.

"There was a ton of pressure on our shoulders with *Halo 3*," Lehto continues, "and the intensity during production was palpable – we all came out of it with a few battle scars! But it was an opportunity for us to fix a lot of things that we felt didn't work too well in *Halo 2*… so we knew we had to look at the AI, we knew we had to make it all look nicer… there was a lot of weight on us, but I think it made us work harder." When *Halo 3* finally released, it proved that the 360's retail value was justified: Bungie's newest effort – aside from presenting the studio's now trademarked sci-fi world in glorious HD – incorporated small details that served to make the *Halo* experience feel even more complete: the stunning galactic vistas now had parallax mapping; draw distances could render real-time movement up to 16 kilometres away; and everything had its own real-time shadow (a small detail, but once you noticed it, you couldn't *stop* noticing it). It all played into making *Halo 3* feel as epic as possible – this world-ending, climactic game would have fallen flat if it just felt the same as *Halo 2*…

"We lovingly called *Halo* a 'galactic romp'," reveals Lehto, "where *Halo 2* became more of a space opera, and that epic kind-of saga continued into *Halo 3*, and even though you were going back to Earth, the scale of it was all still there in *ODST*, too."

"*Halo 3* was super polished, nothing was missing – it was very complete," reflects lead designer, Jaime Griesemer. "We explored everything we could possibly do in *Halo 3*. It was the complete realisation of that *Halo* ideology we had since the first game – look at the Scarab battles, right; we give the player a ton of tools, set them a seemingly impossible challenge and they have to figure it out."

> "HALO 3 WAS SUPER POLISHED, NOTHING WAS MISSING – IT WAS VERY COMPLETE"
> **JAIME GRIESEMER, LEAD DESIGNER, HALO 3**

The Scarab battles in question were some of *Halo 3*'s most intense challenges, and felt like a deliberate nod to the original *Star Wars* trilogy – instead of having an X-Wing to take down AT-ATs, you had a Mongoose, or a Scorpion, or *absolutely nothing* to take down these monolithic walking death-bases. It was another reminder that *Halo* was more than just a game: it was sci-fi fiction, but interactive, player-directed, *new*.

HALO 3: ODST

THE FORGOTTEN SON

"Exploring the cities on Earth offered a great playground to tell create some fantastic fiction," Lehto says when we question him about the domestic route *Halo 3* and *Halo 3: ODST* took in bringing the *Halo* series to Earth. "If you start with the familiar in sci-fi, people don't find it that interesting," agrees Griesemer, "but if you start with the foreign and alien, people naturally get curious about what humans are like in these situations, what Earth looks like."

ODST is an often maligned entry in the *Halo*-verse, but we here at **games™** think it serves an incredibly important point in the overall arc: it humanises the narrative and gives weight to Chief's high drama off on the Ark or on the Halo installations – your squad of Orbital Drop Shock Troopers aren't super-soldiers like Chief, and the immediate danger that surrounds them *at all times* during the game is a potent reminder as to how dangerous the zealous Covenant really are…

Year: 2010 System: Xbox 360

HALO REACH

THE SWANSONG COMPOSED BY BUNGIE TO WAVE GOODBYE TO THE FRANCHISE THAT MADE IT FAMOUS, HALO: REACH WAS THE STUDIO'S MOST AMBITIOUS PROJECT TO DATE

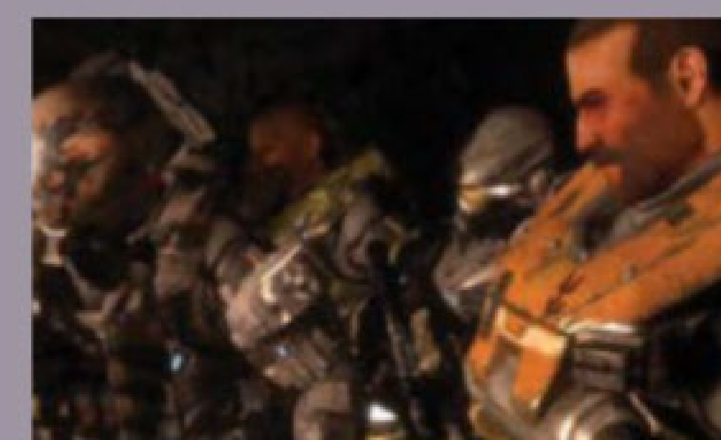
For *Reach*, we wanted to bring things full circle," reveals Marcus Lehto, who by this point in the franchise's life was creative director on the game. "We wanted to go back to *Halo*'s roots and say our final goodbye to the universe in a heartfelt way." *Reach* moved away from Master Chief, and instead was a prequel to the events of *Halo: Combat Evolved*, focusing instead on the heroic last stand of Noble team on human colony Reach's surface in the wake of a Covenant invasion.

"We had one final obligation to Microsoft," Lehto remembers, "and we could have phoned it in – made another small game that felt like *ODST*. But I didn't want to attach my name to something I wouldn't be *really* super proud of. We decided going back to the events prior to *Halo: CE* would be the most fitting way of saying goodbye."

No longer burdened by the weight of Master Chief and his legacy, Lehto and his team had free rein to change established *Halo* assets around a little. Because the game was set before established in-game canon,

"With *Reach*, we pushed the tech far, far further than we did with *Halo 3*," Lehto reflects. "We pushed those draw distances as far as they could go, we got more AI onscreen, we added more dynamic light, more weapons, more vehicles… we put every bit of passion we had into *Reach*. We killed ourselves making it."

Bungie had been forced to dial back parts of *Halo 3* to allow for the 360's hardware – the team had intended to simply port *Halo 3* assets into *Reach* to save on workload, but when it came to development, original assets were improved upon;



BUNGIE'S FINAL STAND

One of Reach's most memorable moments comes after the game is over – you're the last surviving member of Noble team, and you're thrown into a final stand with the Covenant: an unwinnable horde-mode style final mission that serves as a grizzly punctuation to Bungie's *Halo* tenure: it was well-paced, emotional and tense. "I proposed that idea of the final stand to [Bungie staff], and the initial reaction was: 'You should never kill the player like that in a game'," Lehto laughs. "You should never have *that* kind of finality – but, I thought, in this *one* situation, it was justified. I was proud of that, and I think it was executed well enough to have touched the foundation of the people that were playing it… at least I hope so!"



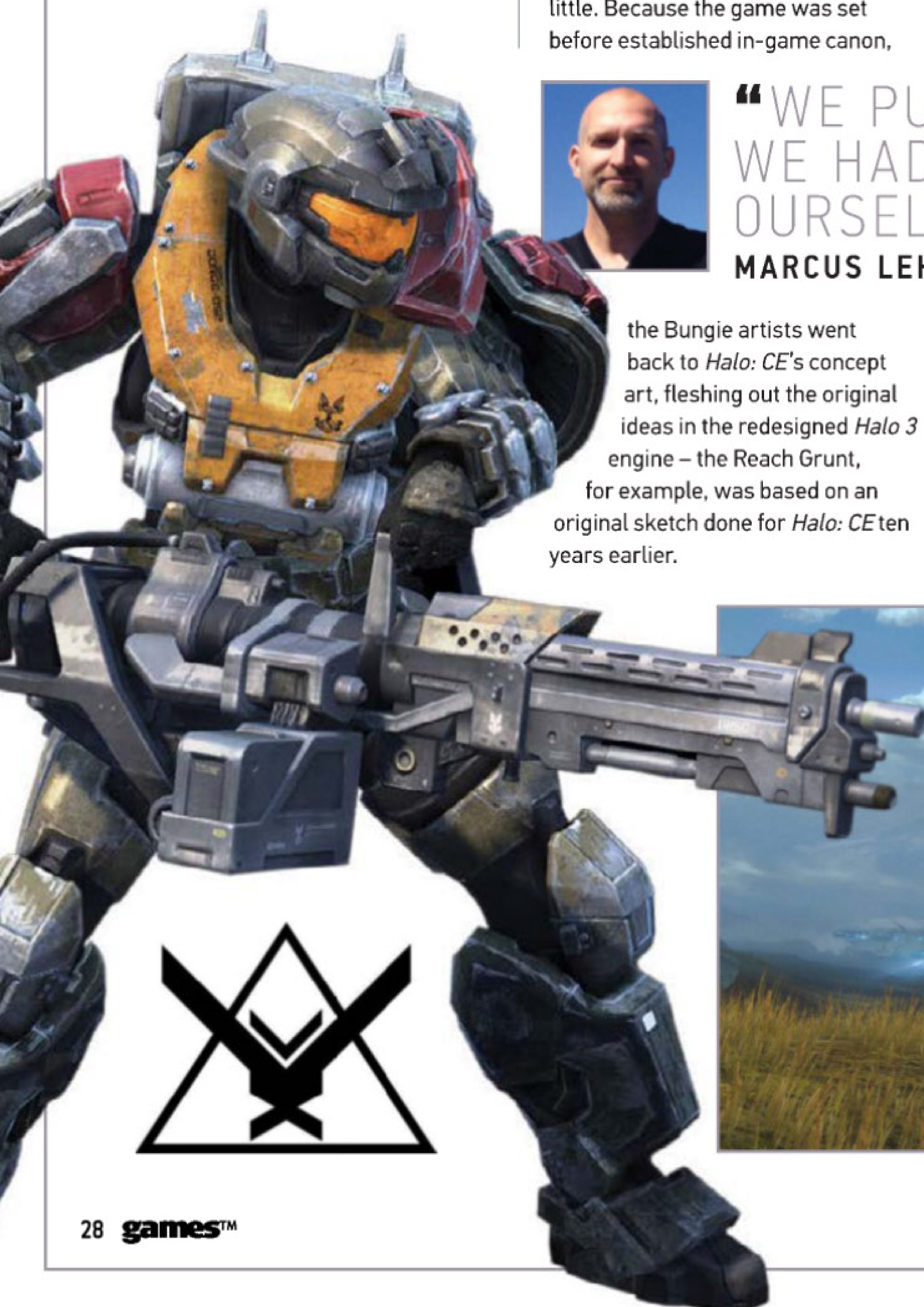
"WE PUT EVERY BIT OF PASSION WE HAD INTO REACH. WE KILLED OURSELVES MAKING IT"

MARCUS LEHTO, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, HALO: REACH

the Bungie artists went back to *Halo: CE*'s concept art, fleshing out the original ideas in the redesigned *Halo 3* engine – the Reach Grunt, for example, was based on an original sketch done for *Halo: CE* ten years earlier.

eventually, the assault rifle in *Reach* was composed of more polygons than a Marine character from *Halo 3*. "We always pushed for the highest bar in what we wanted to create with the Halo games," explains Lehto, "We made the player experience as flawless as we could."







343's first attempt at a solo *Halo* title showed great promise for the future, but split opinion, particularly for its multiplayer.



Year: 2012 **System:** Xbox 360

HALO 4

343'S FIRST CANONICAL RELEASE IN THE HALO UNIVERSE, HALO 4 LAID THE FOUNDATIONS FOR SOME HUGE CHANGES IN THE HALO MYTHOS WITH THE OMINOUS FORERUNNERS

Halo 4 had a lot to prove – not only was it 343 Industries' first full project (the studio's previous work on *Halo Anniversary* had prepared them well for a full development cycle), it was also the return of Chief – a facet of the *Halo* games that consumers had almost forgotten about after the emotional success of Noble Team in *Halo: Reach*.

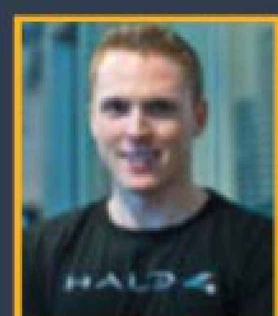
Bringing back Chief seemed like an obvious move, though – even though his story seemed neatly wrapped up in the events of *Halo 3*, 343 knew there was more mileage in the power-armoured hero, and jetted him off into space once more to uncover the mysteries behind the enigmatic Forerunner race. While the narrative of the game veered off in a wholly new direction, most player's focus was glued to the multiplayer. Bungie games all have a very specific flavour – a certain humour, a certain pace, a certain craftsmanship – and long-time *Halo* players were eager to see if 343 could emulate that Bungie feeling.

"As developers, we want to make a game that's new and exciting, but not lose track of things that make *Halo*, well, *Halo*," details Kevin Franklin – lead designer at 343 Industries when we asked him about 343's philosophy when adding to the *Halo* library. "While building new game modes, maps, and experiences, we frequently go back and playtest legacy titles; they all set a very high benchmark. We also hired pro *Halo* gamers onto our development team and their feedback is immensely valuable in helping us shape new experiences."

One of these new multiplayer experiences 343 introduced was the divisive Dominion game mode – an ambitious playlist that combined *Halo*'s rich story assets with a capture-the-flag inspired multiplayer battle mode.

"Dominion was inspired by the ambition of *Reach*'s Firefight," explains Franklin, "we liked the deeper level of fictional immersion, and 343 shared a desire to do something big and bold and new. Creating new modes is a lot of fun, especially when you get to layer on all sorts of configurable options."

Max Hoberman – Creative Director at Certain Affinity, the studio that worked on a lot of *Halo 4*'s multiplayer – agrees: "That's one of the things that I love about *Halo*: the awesome variety of settings that you can (and should!) play around with. Games are meant to be fun, and the series has always embraced this and not taken itself too seriously in multiplayer."



"WHILE BUILDING NEW GAME MODES, MAPS, AND EXPERIENCES, WE FREQUENTLY GO BACK AND PLAYTEST LEGACY TITLES"

KEVIN FRANKLIN, LEAD DESIGNER, 343 INDUSTRIES

INTERVIEW
JEN TAYLOR
GAMES™ SPEAKS TO THE VOICE OF CORTANA

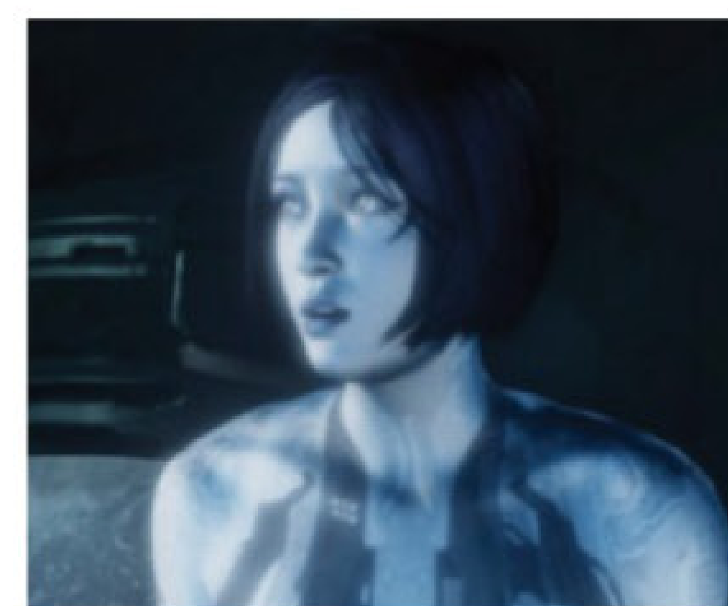


The narrative side of *Halo 4* was a more personal story between Cortana and Chief – focusing on Cortana's latent 'rampancy' finally kicking in. We spoke to Jen Taylor about her *Halo 4* experience.

How do you feel Cortana has evolved since *Halo: CE*?
What a joy it has been to play a character for so many years and see her grow and develop. I learned more about her every game which allowed me to better understand her and, I imagine, better embody her. She went from reluctant guide in the first game to intimate colleague in the most recent.

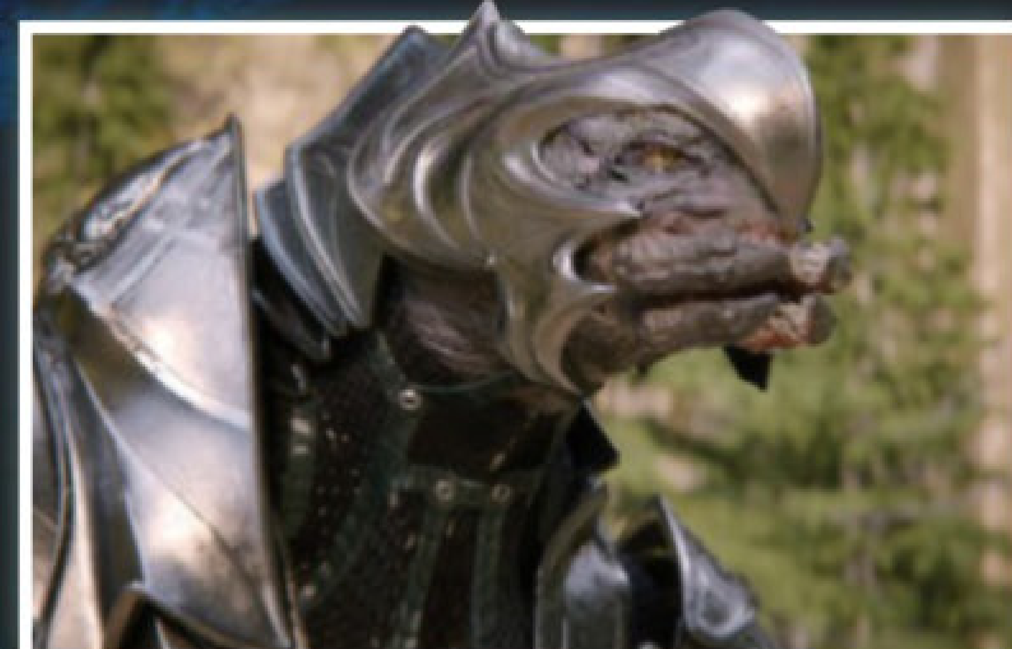
How did it feel going 'rampant' and playing what is effectively an insane person for the latter half of *Halo 4*?
It was an absolute blast to journey down the dark path that the writers took Cortana on in the last game. It's a gift when someone asks you to let loose and lose your mind on mic. Truly. Super freeing and fun and scary. It was exhausting at times, but I am always up for a challenge.

What's been your favourite Cortana moment from the game series so far?
Her final scene. Hands down. Steve and I worked very hard on that scene. It felt like a culmination of all the work we'd done up to that point. It was very emotional and, I'll not lie, many tears were shed.





● The cutscenes in *Halo 2 Anniversary* have been completely remade by Blur using the originals as a template.

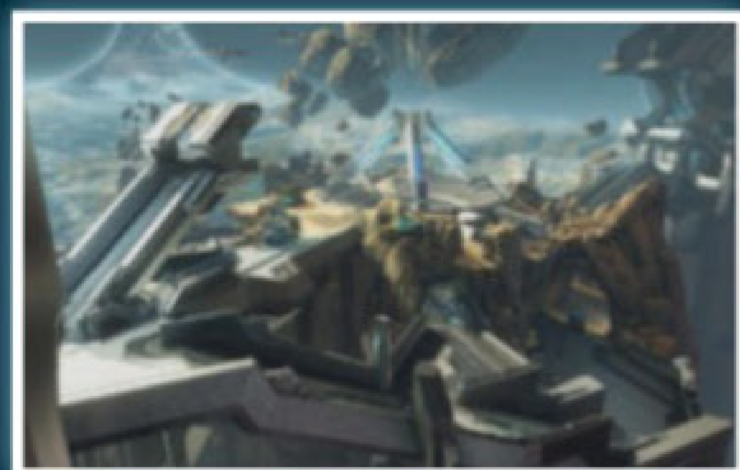


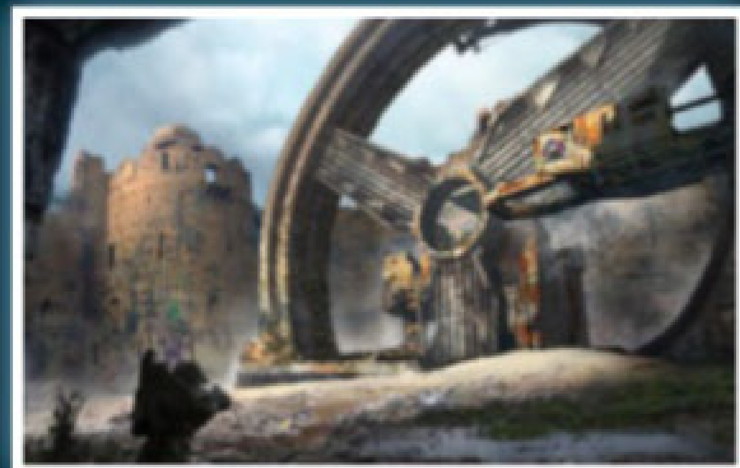


HALO
THE MASTER CHIEF COLLECTION

A TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE AND THE BEGINNING OF A NEW ERA







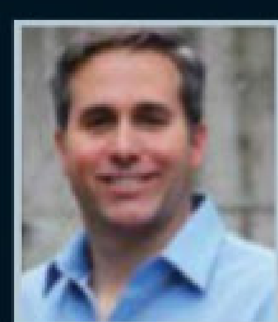
● Six classic *Halo 2* maps have been completely rebuilt with the newest engine for *The Master Chief Collection*.

After celebrating the 10th anniversary of the series debut with *Halo Anniversary*, new custodians of the franchise 343 Industries realised there was still a market for a generation of gamers that had cut their teeth on *Halo*'s multiplayer elements, alongside those that hankered for the earlier crusades of the enigmatic Chief upscaled.

"As we started development it occurred to us that we've now got more power to play with. So we started thinking that we wanted to take advantage of that power, and with *Halo 2: Anniversary* it's like the ability to transition the music with the graphics and all of that good stuff, *at the same time*. So we started thinking, 'Well, with *Halo 5* coming, it's a new generation, how do we bring all of these games and the next one?'

"We can go a lot further, it turns out, than just *Halo 2: Anniversary*! We can give fans *Halo* [*CE*] to *Halo 4* all on one disc at the same time, and not only let people bring their collections forward, but to also prepare for *Halo 5*. I liken it a lot to binging on Netflix before a next season of something comes out; it's a great way for people to catch up."

With no backwards compatibility on the new Xbox hardware, 343 is sating the appetites of gamers who are now in their 20s – gamers that want to reconnect with the stories that matured along with their taste in games. "It's been a really fun process for us," explains Ayoub. "You know, when we did the first *Anniversary* I talked about how that was the game, for a lot of people, that showed you could have a shooter on consoles. As you look at modern games like *Call Of Duty* and *Titanfall*, they really owe their legacy to *Halo 2*'s multiplayer. Going back to it has just been a fantastic stroll down memory lane. That was really the game, on a personal level, that got me playing multiplayer on console, like for so many others. It's been an absolute blast."



> "WHILE BUILDING NEW GAME MODES, MAPS, AND EXPERIENCES, WE FREQUENTLY GO BACK AND PLAYTEST LEGACY TITLES"
> **DAN AYOUB, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER FOR HALO, 343 INDUSTRIES**

Enter *The Master Chief Collection* – a project literally four times as ambitious as *Halo: Anniversary*. "With the first *Halo: Anniversary*, we wanted to do something special for the ten-year anniversary," explains the Collection's producer, Dan Ayoub. "But the landscape had changed a little bit; when we started development on *Halo 2: Anniversary*, we knew we wanted to do a similar treatment to the first one.

HALO 5 GUARDIANS / HALO: NIGHTFALL

A NEW CHALLENGER HAS ENTERED THE RING

Year: 2015 **System:** Xbox One

The sprawling sci-fi universe created by *Halo* has never just been about the gameplay – between books, graphic novels, live action TV shows, *Halo Waypoint* and a myriad of other online content (including a Bungie produced ARG game playfully titled 'I Love Bees'), *Halo* has established itself as one of the most complex and complete sci-fi universes in fiction. Master Chief is merely one thread in a narrative tapestry that extends beyond our solar system, and beyond recorded history.

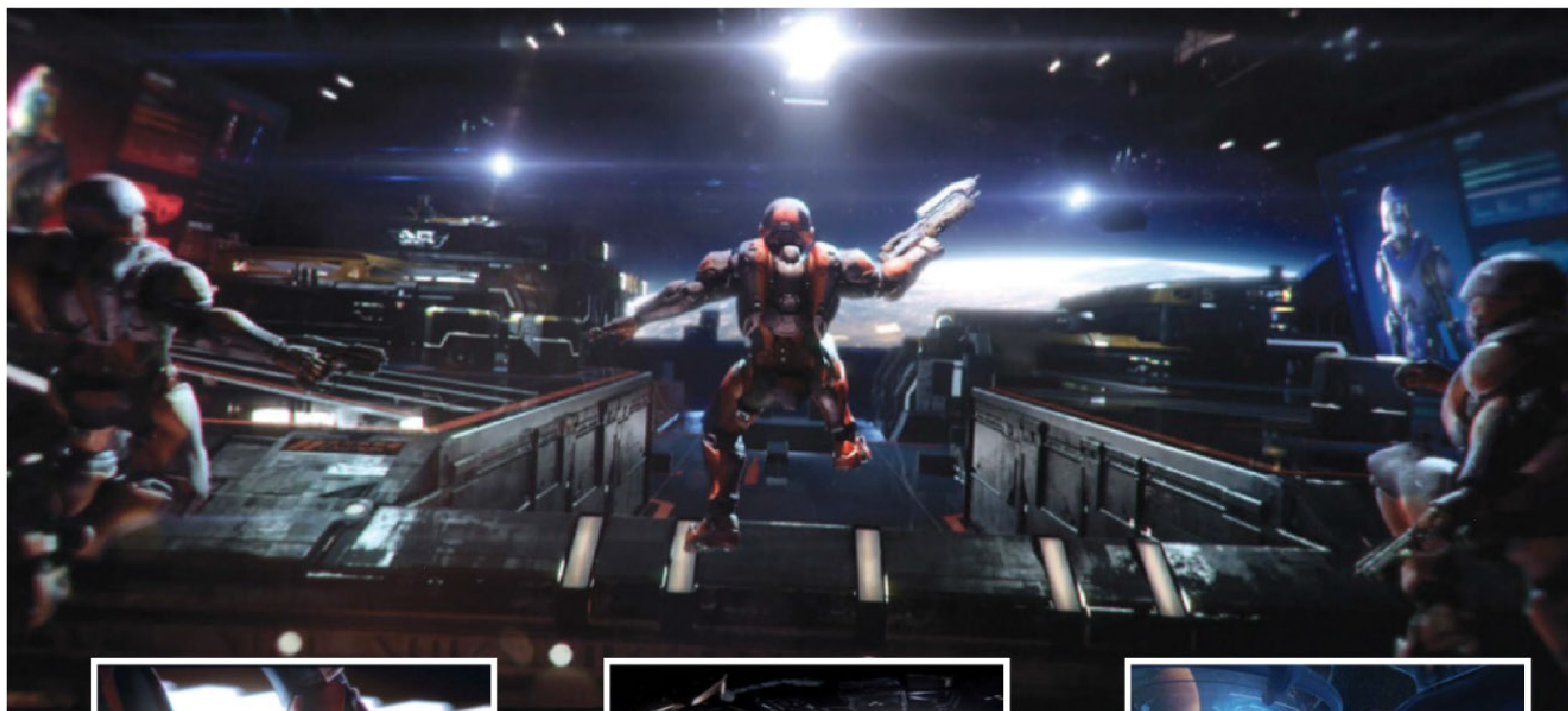
Halo 5 plans to build on what *Halo 4* trailed in the Spartan Ops section of the game, although it's going to be a bit more experimental than *Halo 4*'s episodic mission structure: this time, Microsoft is going to run a dedicated TV series alongside *Guardians*. This has only been done once before – with SyFy's *Defiance* cross-releasing as a game and ongoing TV show. *Defiance* performed poorly as a game, yet has gained a cult following as a TV show – if Microsoft takes its cues from SyFy and learns from the production company's mistakes, the *Halo 5* project could be an incredibly successful cross-media outing.

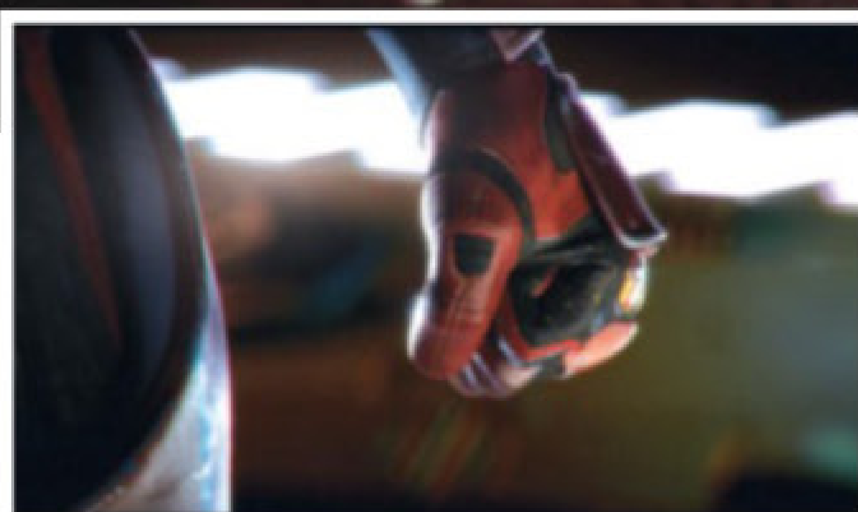
But it's not just the fragmentation of the game that interests us: when *Halo 4* was announced, under the banner of 343, the developer announced it would be the first entry in a whole new *Halo* trilogy – the 'Reclaimer' saga. Since *Halo 5*'s announcement and subsequent information drip-feed, Microsoft Studio's vice president Phil Spencer has stated the publisher and developer have U-turned on that decision – that the 'Reclaimer' saga will likely expand beyond a three-game narrative arc because the studio 'didn't want to limit themselves'.

Halo 5: Guardians will be written by Brian Reed – a notable comic scribe who's taking a break from a long career in comics to join 343 full-time. Reed is a *Halo* veteran, having worked on Marvel's *Halo: Fall of Reach* series, a three issue short – *Initiation – and* the on-going Dark Horse *Halo* comic series *Escalation*. But, for us, his most notable work was on the second volume of Marvel's *Ms. Marvel* series, in which he took the dormant Carol Danvers character and mixed her aggressive personality with insecurity, »



Agent Locke is going to be a second playable character in *Halo 5* with his origin detailed in *Nightfall*.

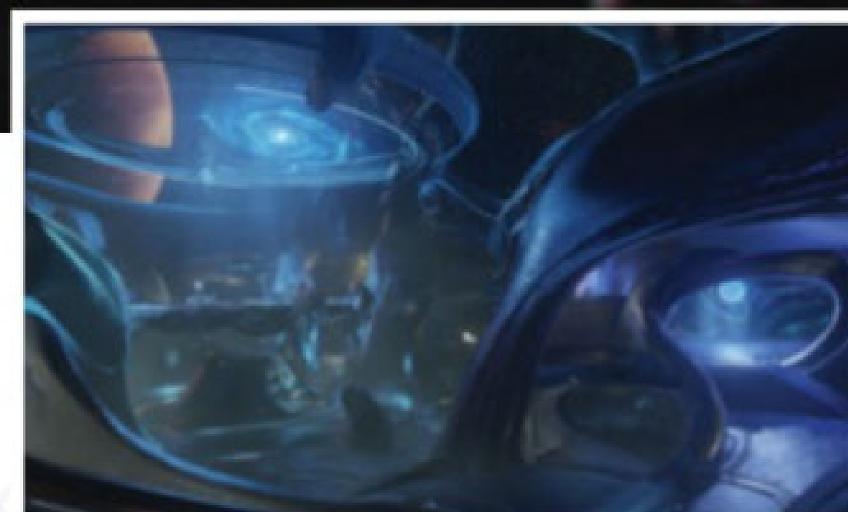




Access to the *Halo 5* beta will be included with every copy of *The Master Chief Collection* this year.



The beta will last for three weeks starting from 29 December 2014. It's one of the longest and earliest for a *Halo* game.



343 seems keen to test tight firefights with this beta, concentrating on classic 4v4 team deathmatch to start.

> "LOCKE'S A THINKER, HE'S VERY LOGICAL, VERY PRECISE… WHEN HE COMES ACROSS SOMETHING THAT HE BELIEVES IN, HE MAKES HIS DECISION AND DOESN'T LOOK BACK"
>
> MIKE COLTER



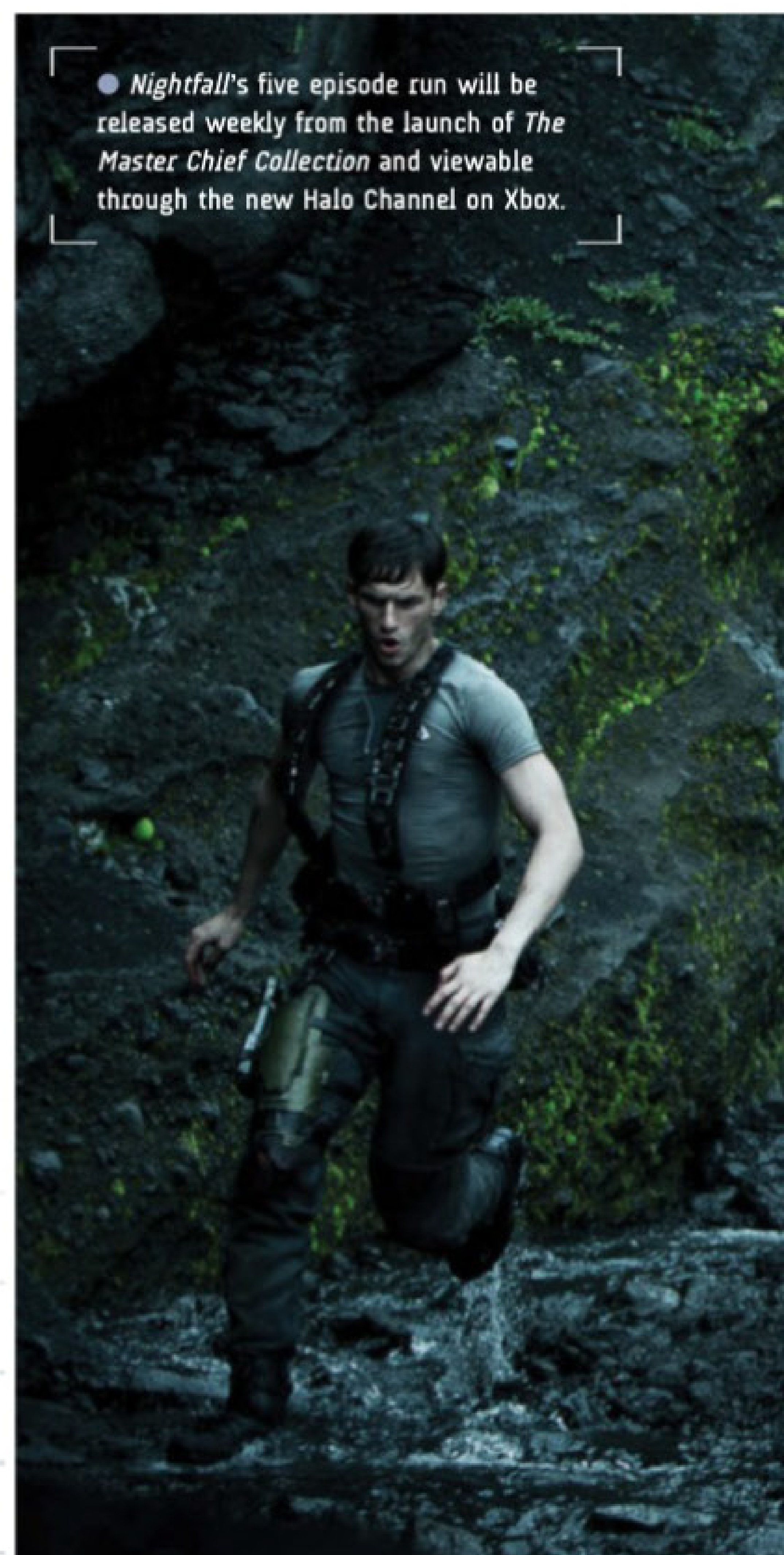
You can follow Agent Jameson Locke's journey from ONI agent to Spartan IV in the new *Halo: Nightfall* show starting this November.



FINISH THE FIGHT

We asked Marcus Lehto what he thought of the direction 343 is taking with *Halo*, and how he feels about the studio's custody of the franchise. "It feels like [343] took my baby, who went off to college and got married to someone else, and are doing something else with it! I respect what they did – but using the Forerunner tech to create this more magical feeling in *Halo 4*? That was a risky direction to take – but I agree they needed to do something different. [*Halo*'s] longevity is a double-edged sword: you need to appease the hardcore crowd, but if you change things too much people say 'It's no longer *Halo*'. It's a tough line to walk, and I have continued respect for 343 and what [it's] doing with *Halo*."

Nightfall takes place on a disintigrating Halo ring as ONI investigates a terrorist attack.



Nightfall's five episode run will be released weekly from the launch of *The Master Chief Collection* and viewable through the new Halo Channel on Xbox.



compassion and a devotion to being a hero… traits that all seem very familiar to *Halo* fans, between mainstay heroes Chief and Cortana.

But this isn't a Chief story – at least not centrally. Both *Nightfall* and *Guardians* will revolve around newcomer Jameson Locke – a surly UNSC-drafted soldier brought in to hunt Master Chief down after he goes rogue, following the events of *Halo 4*. Chief is pursuing the traitorous Dr. Halsey – the woman responsible for creating the Spartans and Cortana – in the hopes that she can restore Cortana to her former working parameters (the AI is, after all, modelled on Halsey herself). It's an ambitious move – introducing a whole new character five games into the central canonical narrative – but Kiki Wolfkill, executive producer of the *Halo* franchise at large, is confident it's the right call.

"We're always thinking of new ways of telling the *Halo* story, whether that's in live action pieces, comics or anything else. We're also always considering what the best way of communicating character is – think about the game; you see one side of things, really, so what's the best way of letting you get to know these other characters, these other places in the world? That's what we're exploring [with *Nightfall*]."

Sci-fi virtuoso Ridley Scott has been recruited by 343 to act as producer on the film, a decision that makes sense, considering what Wolfkill told us: Scott is a master of domesticating science fiction, of turning the outlandish – the exotic, the cosmically foreign – into something immediately identifiable and accessible. *Halo* needs that: it needs the human touch, something to make us care about these characters we've followed to the edges of known space and back.

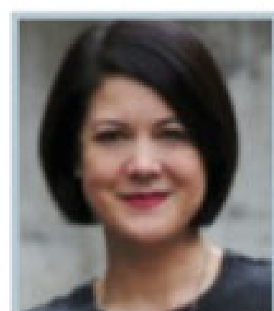
"We had a pretty interesting first meeting with Scott – he told us [*Halo*] was a universe he was interested in, and he was intrigued with the things we were doing," explains Wolfkill. "For him it was interesting to have a universe that was somewhat established to play around in, and it was funny to see [he noticed] the elements of his work that *Halo* had leaned on in the past – and vice versa, too: I think he's been influenced by things we've done before."

So where does Locke come into this? It seems that the new protagonist is the connection the franchise needs to bring that human element into the universe: unlike Chief, Locke isn't a full Spartan when we meet him – we get to see his face, we get to understand his motives, we get to live alongside him for a while and take a good hard look at what he's about – something we never got to do with the stoic John-117.

"Locke's a thinker, he's very logical, very precise and he doesn't do anything half-cocked," explains the actor behind Agent Locke's helmet, Mike Colter. "He really takes in everything, takes in the information and relies on his team to help him make the right decisions. But when he comes across something that he believes in, he makes his decision and doesn't look back."

The *Nightfall* experience was written as a feature film, but is being broken into episodic segments to be released concurrently with *Halo 5: Guardians*. The live-action portion of the whole *Halo 5* package will »

Many of the teaser images so far for *Halo 5: Guardians* are showing a lot of incredibly impressive urban settings. Very different to the teaser trailer.



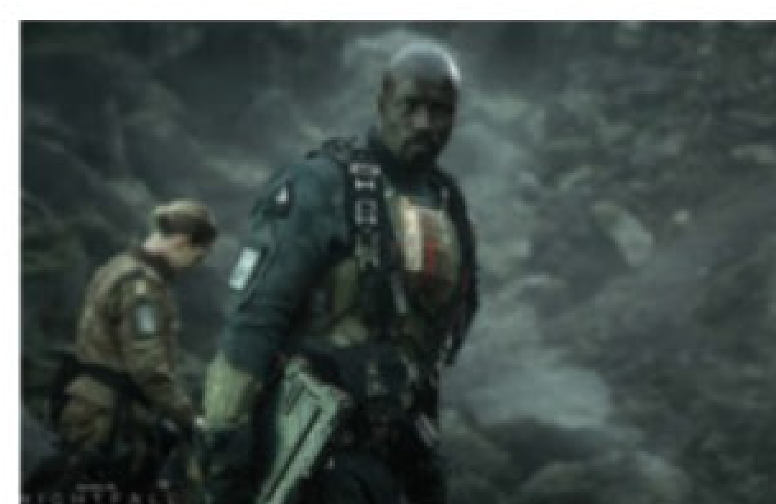
"WE'RE ALWAYS THINKING OF NEW WAYS OF TELLING THE HALO STORY, WHETHER THAT'S IN LIVE ACTION PIECES, COMICS OR ANYTHING ELSE"

KIKI WOLFKILL, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER FOR HALO, 343 INDUSTRIES

focus on Locke travelling to a planet new to the *Halo* universe to quieten a threatening Covenant presence. "[*Nightfall*] is basically Locke dealing with a terrorist threat immediately," explains Colter. "There's a treaty with the Covenant and Locke goes to the planet Sedra because he suspects there's been a breach of the treaty. There's talk of a bomb that's been built and that's a direct violation. It's sort of like, 'Here we are in America, we're always suspecting who might have nuclear capabilities, and what we're dealing with is similar: we are trying to figure out who is a threat against the humans. If the treaty is broken there's the implication of war, and we deal with that immediately.' It's a manhunt of sorts. With the information Locke and his team has discovered, they are going to have to find out what's what."

The Covenant are up to their old tricks, and it's down to a small crew of professionals to step up and take action. Bringing Locke into the universe in both a cinematic and gameplay way is a pincer attack on those expecting 'just another Master Chief game'. After all, with 343 releasing *The Master Chief Collection* later this year, it makes sense to focus on a fresh face – and it gives the writers a chance to really try something new in a universe where humans have been on the back foot all too often.

"I think it's an advantage not knowing much about the *Halo* world. It's almost like… the ignorance of the gaming world and of the *Halo* franchise helped me a lot," Colter explains when we ask if he was au fait with the vast *Halo* mythos before jumping on-board with *Halo 5*. "If I'd have known exactly how big it was, I think there would have been a lot more pressure! It's nice to go into something, to really create something from an artistic aspect and working in a bubble, than to be completely exposed to the scope of what you're doing. In doing so I think we are creating a character that [the audience] don't know, and also they haven't really had a lot of fleshed-out characters before. The series has its characters, but this is the first time you get to see one of these [Spartans] sans helmet, sans armour; you're going to see a human guy trying to get through life and trying to make some decisions like everyone else."



343 and Microsoft seem keen to establish Locke as a new linchpin of the Halo franchise.

It's an interesting approach that 343 is taking with the *Halo* experience, and one that seems to be a response to a criticism often levied at the franchise: that you play as a brute, an automaton without emotions who's just carrying out orders. By bringing the player in and making them care about Locke in *Nightfall*, it's going to aid their agency in Guardians – making Locke's manhunt for Master Chief an experience worthy of the *Halo* name.

"I am a playable character in *Halo 5*," reveals Colter. "[Agent Locke] is one of the primary characters. Once [*Guardians*] comes out, you're basically going to be playing a game with me as the primary character. I'll have some cool weaponry, and some cool abilities, because by that time I'll be a Spartan IV. You can feel like you're playing as your favourite character, because [after *Nightfall*] you *know* Jameson Locke, and it's that human connection I wanted to bring to the role."



"It felt like the first game that you could do whatever you wanted in"
GARY NAPPER, LEAD DESIGNER, CREATIVE ASSEMBLY



WHY I ♥…

Frontier Elite 2

GARY NAPPER, LEAD DESIGNER, CREATIVE ASSEMBLY

“*I'd have to say, of all the games I've played and loved, my choice would have to be* Frontier Elite 2*. Simply because I was in space! I was in space, and I had a ship. And I could fight people or trade or do whatever I liked. And it felt like the first game that you* could *do whatever you wanted in. The scale of the world, for that time, was incredible. Since then, I've played games that put you into a huge open-world and let you do one thing or another, but* Frontier Elite 2 *was the first game to do it properly – for me. And it wasn't just that you were in space; there was more going on there, too, so many systems working together and it was just…* this experience*… Yeah. I love* Elite *[laughter].*”



Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain

CONCEPT The second part of the *Metal Gear Solid V* project, Kojima intends to push even more boundaries – doing proper stealth in a proper open world

Young girl, they call them the Diamond Dogs

We recently managed to get some hands-on time with *Metal Gear Solid V*, running as the game was designed, on the PS4. Kojima's intentions in making this a first-of-its-kind open world stealth experience are obvious from the start. The fractured release of the often maligned *Ground Zeroes* is somewhat justified when you first start playing *The Phantom Pain* – without some grounding in how *Metal Gear* works now, you'd be thrown in at the deep end, and you'd drown.

Our play session started with Snake attempting to infiltrate a desert base. We begin on horseback, pretty much emulating the screenshots and trailers that have saturated the internet the past year or so – the ones designed to show off the game. We spot a jeep full of enemy soldiers crest a hill heading our way, and our handler on the demo tells us that we have the ability to make the horse defecate on the road (we're about to question whether he's serious, but then remember that this a Hideo Kojima game – everything's possible). We give the horse a little kick in the flank, and – right on cue – it dumps a load of manure right in the middle of the dusty path. We trot off to hide beside the road and watch as the jeep swerves out of control after driving through the horse's manure – the two drivers get stunned after smacking their heads on the jeep's frame. It's hardly realistic, but it's got that now classic goofball Kojima humour.

Before the soldiers regained their senses, we were directed to attach a balloon to the jeep, lifting it into the air (long-time fans of the series will recognise the real-life Fulton Recovery System from *Peace Walker*). After discovering that this fun little tool was making a return, we had the chance to play around with it – this was our first real revelation in the game: *The Phantom Pain* really is a sandbox. Kojima introduces mechanics and tools to you, and expects you to go out of your way to be as ridiculous as you can with them. It's a dark game in tone and narrative, but the ability to play around with the mechanics saves the game from ever taking itself too seriously.

You can attach the Fulton to sheep, individual soldiers, tanks, jeeps – almost anything. And it's not just a tool you can use to send assets back to your Mother Base (more on that later); we saw a fellow demoer sitting next to us knock out two soldiers in their jeep, attach C4 to the vehicle, wait for about ten seconds until the sound of an enemy helicopter was buzzing through the speakers, and then attach the Fulton. The jeep hit the helicopter and set off a chain reaction of ridiculous explosions – this is the open world *Metal Gear* game we've been promised for years.

> "We are confident that the FOX Engine will both expand and revolutionise the Metal Gear Solid series, and will provide the high-quality and immersive experiences that are associated with all titles produced by Kojima Productions"
>
> **SHINJI HIRANO, PRESIDENT OF KONAMI DIGITAL ENTERTAINMENT**

/// Of course, it wouldn't be a legitimate open world unless characters other than those controlled by the player populated it. As such, the game will contain its own dynamic and responsive ecosystem. You can directly impact upon this cycle with different consequences coming from different actions. One of the sheep we decided to attach a Fulton too, for example, was part of a larger flock – the hunting ground for local wolves. If we dwindled the number of the sheep

INFORMATION

Details

Format: Multi
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Konami
Developer: Kojima Productions
Release: 2015
Players: 1

Developer Profile

Most notable for his work on the *Metal Gear* series, Hideo Kojima and his development team pioneered the Fox Engine, and have also been involved with *Castlevania*, *Zone Of The Enders* and *Snatcher*. A distinct style, diverse influences and a taste for the dramatically absurd set Kojima apart from his peers.

Developer History

Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance **Multi [2013]**
Metal Gear Solid 4 **PS3 [2008]**
Zone Of The Enders **PS2 [2001]**

High Point

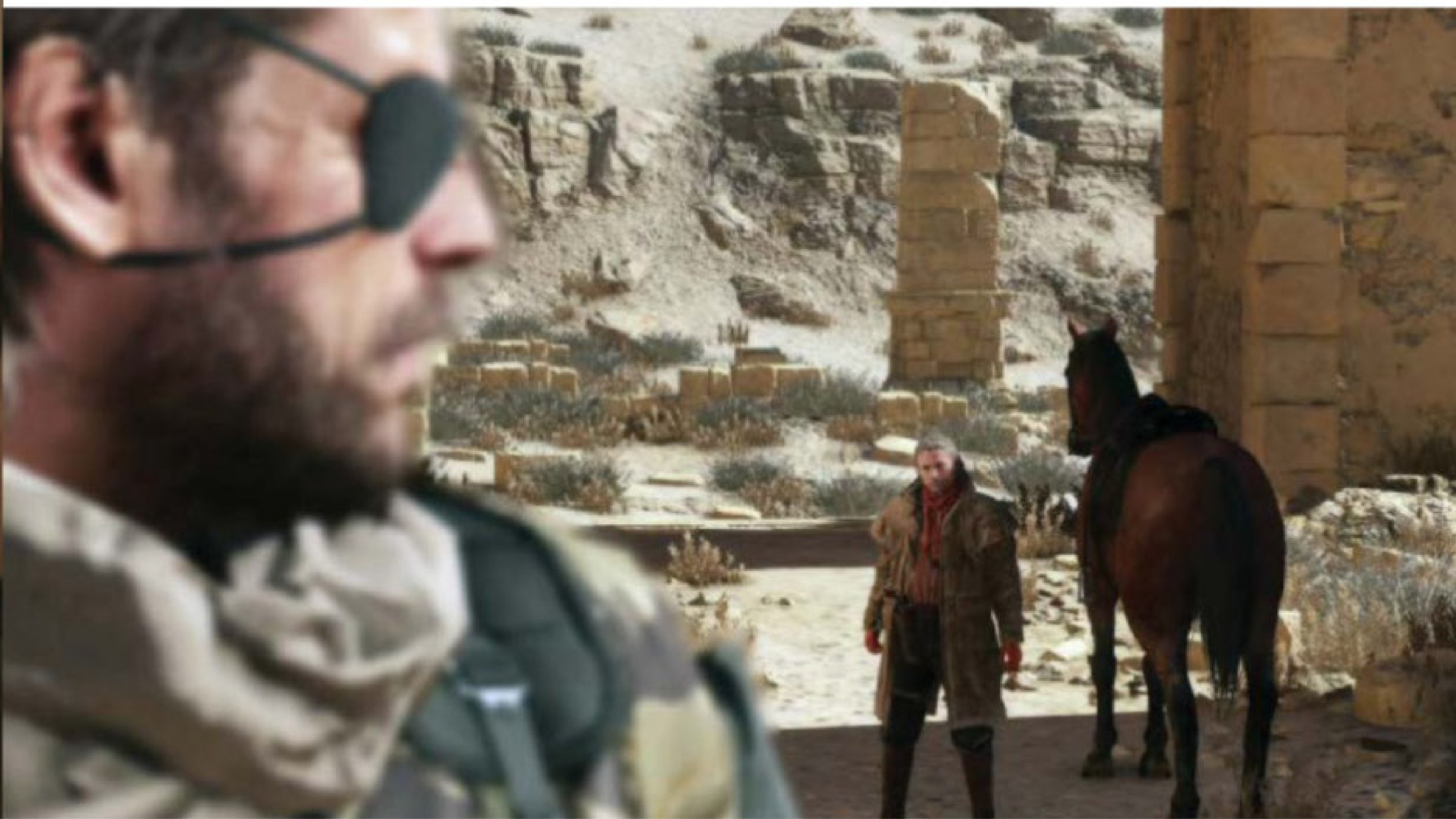
The original *Metal Gear Solid* showed off just how capable a machine the PlayStation was, with cinematic cut-scenes providing an experience unseen on consoles at the time.







Below: There are a variety of methods of transportation through *MGS V*, all of them intentionally thought about by Kojima and his team to show you how vast and diverse the new game world is. Horses, cars, planes and motorbikes are all yours for the taking.

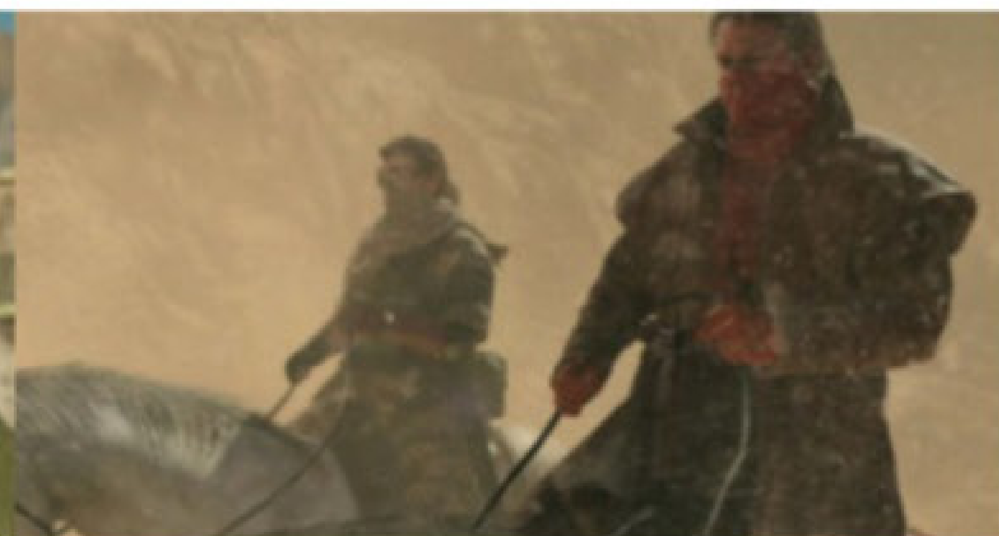




THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX?

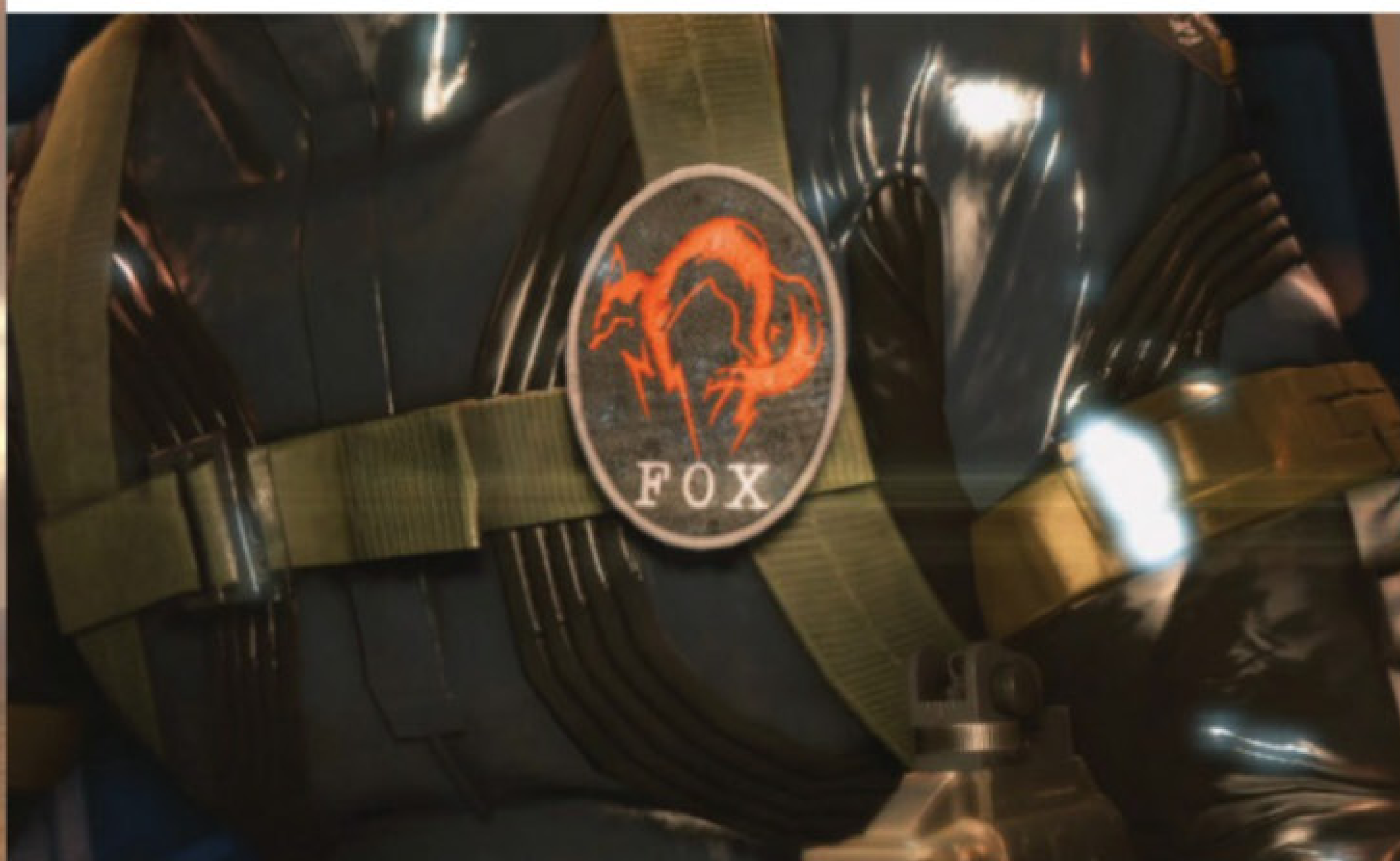
ONE OF THE ways you can distract and lure out guards in *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* is by cloaking yourself in a cardboard box with decals of pin-up models on them. Unsurprisingly, this caused a bit of a ruckus when it was announced, but it's standard Kojima – pushing the game's realism to somewhere between grounded and comic book. Pop out a cardboard flap with a bikini-clad woman on it, and a guard will spot you with it, slack-jawed with comic arousal, and plod clumsily over to you. If you're quick, you can throw yourself out of the box, sneak behind the guard and bonk him on the head, Fulton-ing him away, a victim of his own lust.





Below: Kojima's in-house developed FOX Engine is looking as vibrant and impressive as ever – the textures up close on all the different fabrics are stunning, and the particle effects when you're driving through dusty Afghan outbacks are mesmerising.





enough, the wolves would get hungry and turn their attention on other viable sources of food – potentially you (although we did think how interesting it would be to snipe all the sheep in an area, smoke a cigar to pass the time, and lure the wolves to a patrolling group of guards, letting nature play out and allowing us to sneak into a stronghold undiscovered).

The thing is, the AI has also been drastically improved for the *Phantom Pain* – even since *Ground Zeroes*. Just because you don't ever get discovered, it doesn't mean the AI won't know something's afoot: if you're insistent on sneaking around at night, unloading silent terror on your enemies, guards at other installations will cotton onto this, stepping up after-hours patrols or brightening the floodlights to prevent you creeping around. Likewise, if you favour the 'go in loud' approach, the various military bases in the game will amp up their security, drafting in better (more lethal) equipment or investing in bulletproof helmets if all you do is go for headshots. It's a notable increase of situational awareness, and takes the game one step further to being the definitive tactical stealth experience – you've got to evolve as your enemies evolve: it takes the one-dimensional 'wait, watch and kill' pattern the previous *Metal Gears* revolved around, and augments it wonderfully.

We noticed that a lot of the game is going to revolve around retracing your footsteps and backtracking to previously unlocked areas, so we're hoping that this deeply responsive AI code will help keep things fresh. We put a decent amount of time into *Ground Zeroes*, and although the military camp was small, it still felt fun to explore – even on the tenth run. Let's hope Kojima Productions can keep that fun repetitiousness alive in *The Phantom Pain*, too.

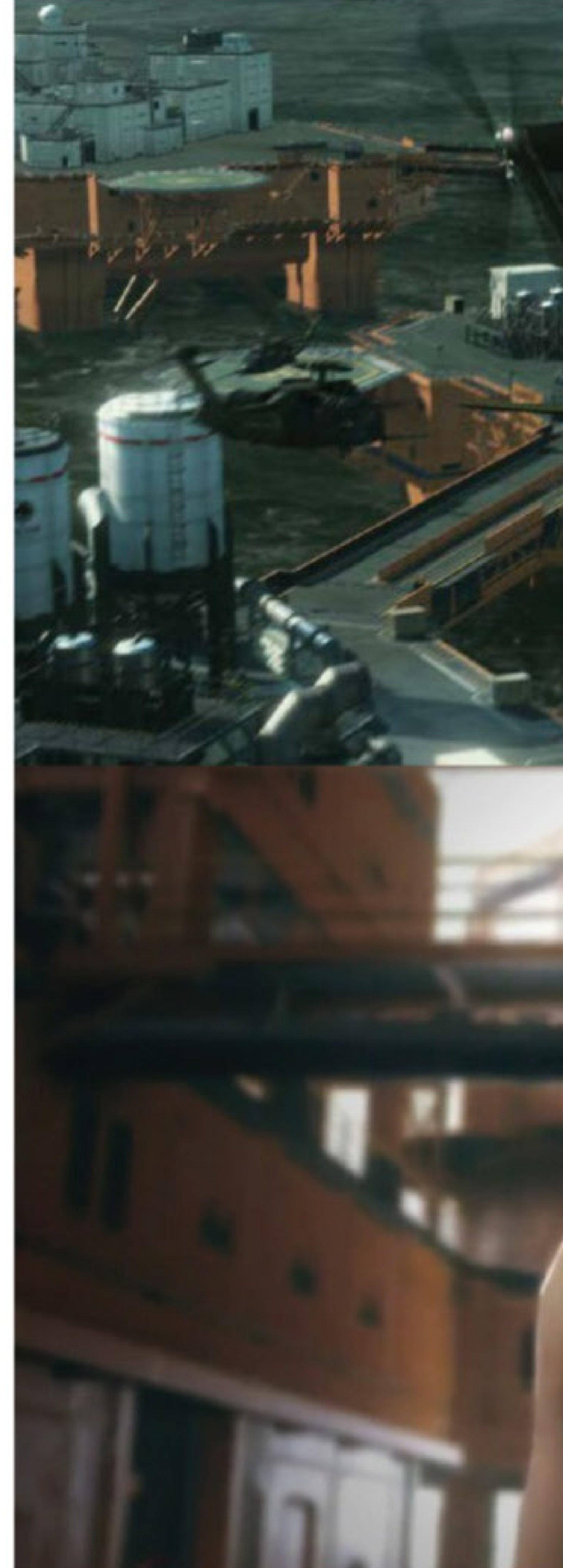
/// This potential monotony is broken up by a player-directed narrative – in a departure for the series, you'll be able to choose which story missions you embark on as you like, instead of being forced to play through the game in a specific order. It reminded us of *Mass Effect 2*, weirdly enough: in *The Phantom Pain*, you can choose to go take out this base, free these hostages, or travel to the other side of the map, just as you could choose whose Loyalty/Recruitment missions you could do at any time in *Mass Effect 2*. Kojima promises that no matter which order you decide to complete the game in, you'll understand the main narrative

ALL QUIET ON THE MIDDLE-EASTERN FRONT

One of *Metal Gear Solid V*'s new characters is Quiet – the aptly named mute assassin. Despite the amount of chatter the newcomer has caused, there's been precious little information revealed about her – all that we know so far is that she possesses of some kind of invisibility ability that allows her to completely disappear from sight for a limited time. Her eyes can also darken, terrifyingly, implying that she has some kind of cybernetic optics augmentation (we've yet to see the implications of this in-game). Quiet's been the centre of a lot of discussion here at the office (there's a particularly interesting theory about her formerly being Chico – the small boy from *Ground Zeroes*), so we're excited to learn more about her in the coming weeks.

"Moving forward, we… want one single human to get [Snake's] voice, face and motion in the game and become the character"

HIDEO KOJIMA, DIRECTOR, KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS



Right: The standard 'tactical espionage action' is always going to be the central staple of any *Metal Gear Solid* game, and we're happy to see it come back so strongly in *The Phantom Pain*. Below: The Fulton Recovery System has undergone an almost complete reinvention since its appearance in *Peace Walker*, and we're confident in saying that it looks likely to be the most fun part of *The Phantom Pain*.



Above: Expect the game to be the darkest and most thematically upsetting of all the *Metal Gear* entries yet. Between child soldiers, sexual violence, torture and mutilation, it seems that *The Phantom Pain* isn't going to be a game for the faint of heart.















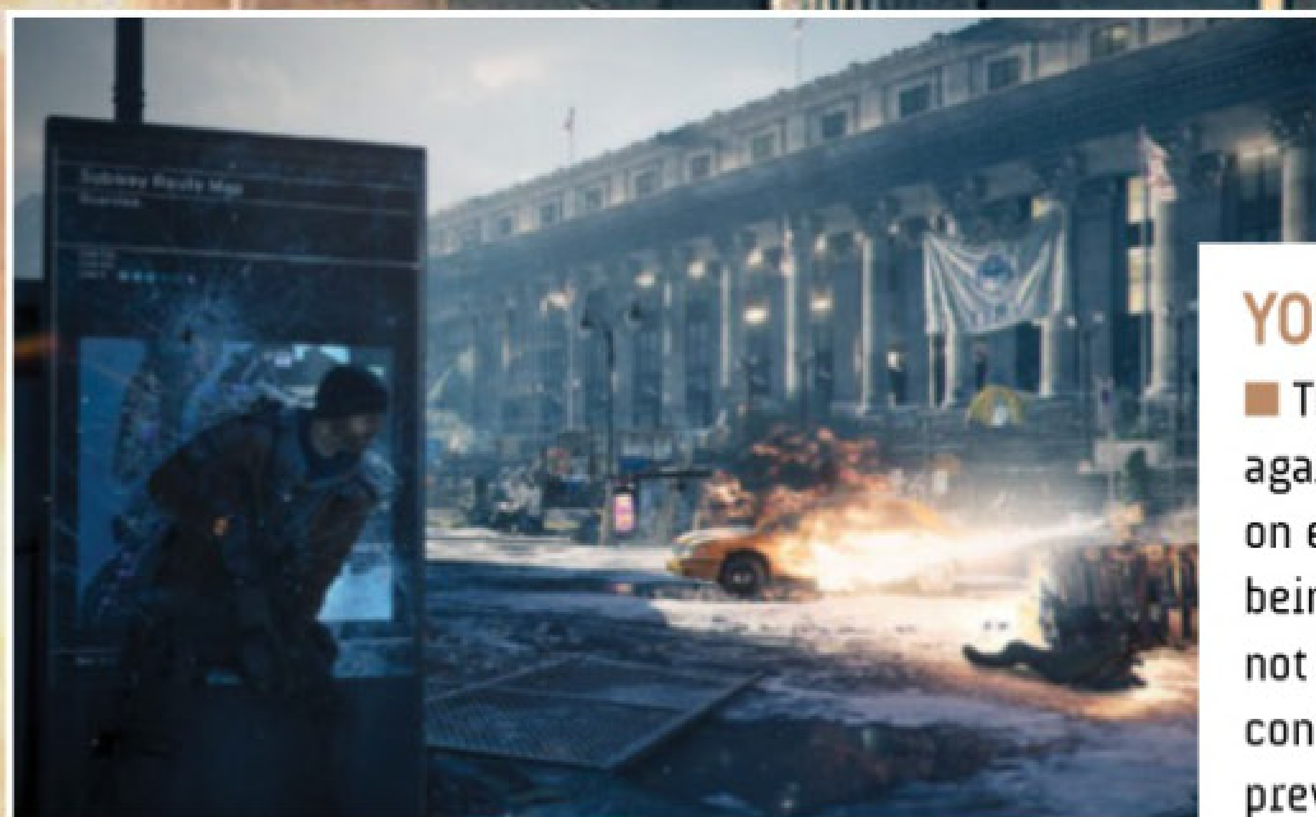
of the game by the end, when all the individual story threads tie together.

The Phantom Pain also seems to be taking a couple of cues from the old PSP *Metal Gear Ac!d* series, too – each player will be able to construct a Mother Base from which you can develop your own armaments and items. The enemy soldiers you abduct via the Fulton Recover System – and the prisoners you free from enemy bases – can all be recruited to your HQ, allowing you to expand your ranks and farm more items through organising your resources.

Multiplayer will come into the Mother Base section of the game, too – in a move similar to the Secret Bases from the original *Pokémon Ruby/Sapphire* games, you can sneak into the Mother Base of players on your friends list and loot their items, stealing resources or even personnel from them. You can install security cameras, armed security, infrared trip lasers, unmanned aerial drones and many others to deter folks from rummaging through your base, as well as adding platforms and creating a whole level in your own design, with an interface reminiscent of *Halo*'s Forge modes. You got a special item you don't want stealing? Cram it in a corner with multiple platforms leading to it and a couple of chokepoints (armed turrets, security cameras and trip mines bloating one path), and it'll be as impenetrable as it can be. You can also stand in to defend the base yourself, shooting at another Snake that comes to invade your ground should you find yourself back at HQ in time. Bear in mind that nothing is ever properly safe, though. According to Kojima, everything in your base is always at risk.

It raises a few questions – namely, everyone that will be playing the game will be Snake, so how will the game accommodate so many different versions of the same player? We assume that Kojima is going to find a fittingly genius/absurd way of dealing with the plot hole, but we're curious to see whether he'll sacrifice some of the legitimacy of the game world in honour of a multiplayer side to the game that may not even be compulsory.

More than anything, *The Phantom Pain* seems to be an ambitious game – one of the most fully next-gen experiences in the works at the moment. The map weighs in at 200 times the size of the *Ground Zeroes* map, but considering *Metal Gear* has always made a point of getting the player from zone A to zone B, giving them a little freedom in between, we wonder how well suited the team at Kojima Productions are to crafting a truly open-world experience. Granted, the game has full weather systems, a day/night cycle and a fully functional, devoted ecosystem, but can Kojima Productions fill the game with the detail a project of that size deserves? We hope so, but from the areas and textures we've seen so far, we're curious to see how fully realised the massive world that makes up *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain* will be. 



YOU MUST WORK TOGETHER

The demo we recently played featured fights against lots of enemies at once. There's a emphasis on each player honing specific skills to prevent being swarmed or flanked in enemy skirmishes, not to mention how useful the companion-app-controlled ally drone is in a fight. Also, you'll want to prevent enemies from retreating the scene, as they'll hit back later with reinforcements.

GETTING AROUND

One of the most interesting features of the game we've come across is how it's paced. At the end of our demo we were rewarded with an upgraded gas mask, which would then enable us to explore other areas of the map that have a higher contagion level. This appears to be how *The Division* is limiting players' activity in the world and scaling the difficulty accordingly.



INFORMATION

Details

Format: PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox One
Origin: Sweden
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Massive
Release: TBA 2015
Genre: Action-Adventure
Players: Massively Multiplayer

Developer Profile

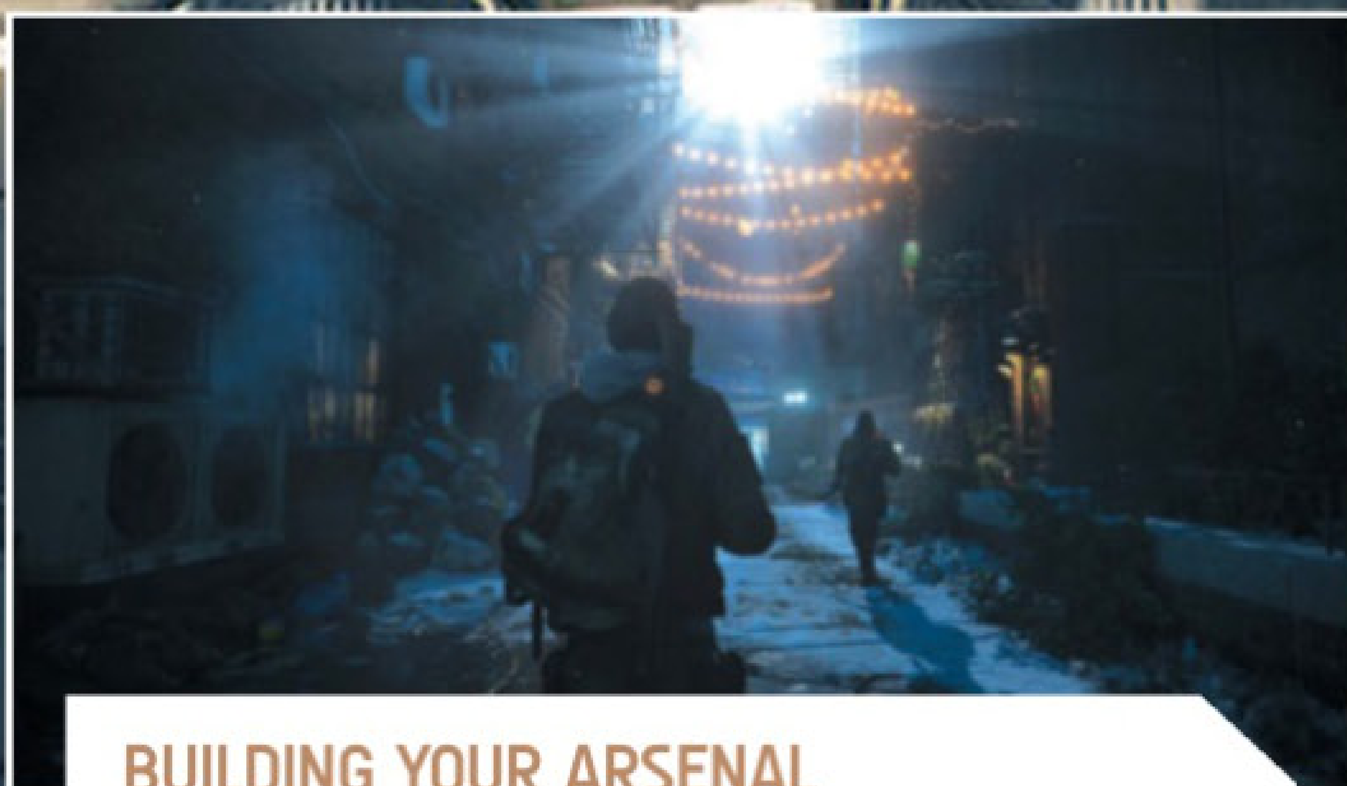
Ubisoft Massive has been around for close to two decades, originally called Massive Entertainment. In 2002, Vivendi acquired the studio, before Activision sold it to Ubisoft in 2008. Under its new patronage, it provided development support for *Assassin's Creed: Revelations* and *Far Cry 3*. *The Division* marks the first solo project for the studio since joining Ubisoft.

High Point

RTS World In Conflict is an exceptional strategy title from the studio and received a score of 9 when games™ reviewed it back in issue 62.

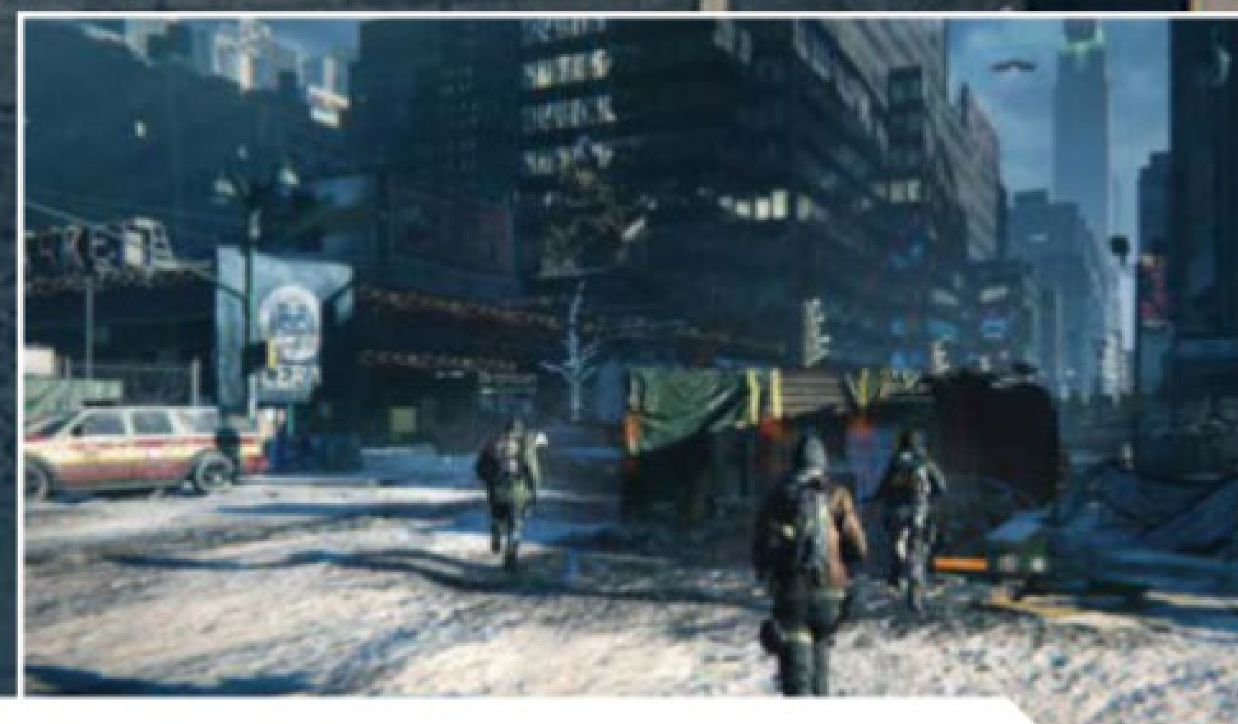
Developer History

Far Cry 3 (co-developed)
2012 [Multi]
Assassin's Creed: Revelations (co-developed)
2011 [Multi]
World In Conflict
2007 [PC]
Ground Control
2000 [PC]



BUILDING YOUR ARSENAL

Every weapon in the game can be upgraded, including grenades and ammo types to better balance your team – such as specialists in health provisions and brute force weaponry. However, these specialisations (such as the type of grenade you're carrying) can be switched on the fly due to a point system, which can be reallocated to upgrade other weapons and technology.



SAVING THE WORLD

Missions are initiated from the map screen, which creates a digital overlay over your current location. The map is split into districts, each with their own Security, Contagion and Morale stats. Security informs you of the likelihood of being attacked, Contagion the risk of being infected, and Morale offers an indicator of how likely you are to receive support from local civilians. Once the Morale and Security ratings are high enough, you can establish a 'Base of Operations' in the area.

The Division

CONCEPT A massively multiplayer third-person shooter that immerses players in a disease-ravaged New York City looking for resources to survive (and, probably, some XP)

Changing The Clancyverse Forever

Every time we see *The Division*, the more we realise that it's an RPG disguised as a third-person shooter. Thrown into a co-op assault mission, **games™** finds itself infiltrating a derelict supermarket and claiming back the area by removing the native Cleaners – a group of radicals that use flamethrowers to purge the city of its deadly virus by immolating everything and everyone in sight.

Flanked by three allies, we set to work circumventing the enemies and clearing the area before we're reduced to a flame-grilled puddle on a sidewalk.

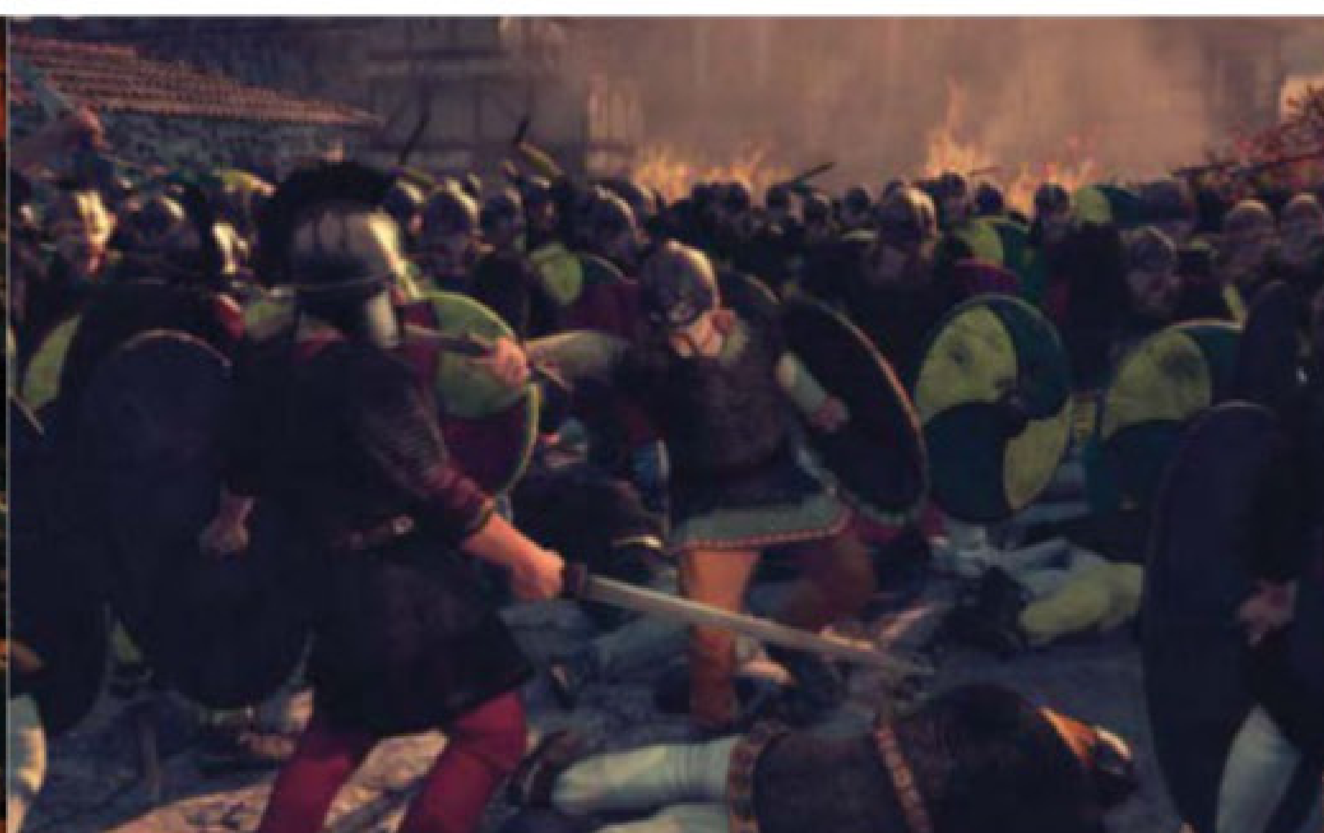
The structure of the scenario might appear familiar to anyone who has previously roamed the Clancyverse: shoot the bad guys, clear the room and follow your objective marker. But what's surprising is just how Ubisoft Massive's freshman release subverts expected action tropes in favour of RPG design principles. This is a game where balance and skill trees are just as fundamental to making it through a firefight as hip-fire accuracy. A game where a team of soldiers with clearly defined roles has each other to rely on, rather than their grenade stock. It's a game about the players.

It's the concept that forms the formidable ambition at the core of *The Division*, elevating the action beyond its impressive bluster and into a game formed on deep and richer experience. With that in mind, **games™** breaks down a few of the core features that'll help you survive when the game arrives next year.



Difficulty is something the CA team was keen to talk up. Attila is a game aimed at hardcore *Total War* players, with only the bare minimum of concessions being made for newcomers. They'll still be able to get into it, mind.





HELLO DARKNESS, MY OLD FRIEND

WE ASKED JANOS Gaspar to give a general overview of Attila's setting: "We start almost 400 years after the end of *Rome II*; it's a completely new era. Rome is crumbling, it's already divided into two parts. It's so immense in territory that it's hard to manage. Although the army is huge at this point – 500,000 people in the Roman army – it's stretched across Europe and northern Africa. Many of the elements aren't even Roman any more, they're conscripted from barbarians, or passing tribes. The empire is crumbling. We are telling the story of the fall of the Roman empire and the birth of the Dark Ages."

Above: It's not just about the Huns and Romans, with other factions – like the Saxons – represented and playable. Right: The *Total War* formula will be familiar to those returning to the series. If it ain't broke, don't fix it. (Rome II was broke, so they fixed it).





Total War: Attila

CONCEPT ■ Taking the now stable Rome II engine, Attila takes the action to the dawn of the Dark Ages… and the fall of Rome.

Total War's Roman Armageddon

Built on the ashes of Rome, in more ways than one, *Total War: Attila* is the Creative Assembly's attempt to not only tell the story of one of history's great conquerors (and the fall of one of the world's greatest empires), but an attempt to seek atonement for the initially underwhelming Rome II. Having played it and spoken to the developers, it's already looking like this 2015 release won't suffer anywhere near as many issues as last year's game did.

While the core experience – a turn-based campaign map and real-time battle maps – stays much the same, elements have been tweaked, created and reintroduced to make this one of the most complex *Total War* games to date. But it's not just mechanical differences, as Janos Gaspar, lead designer, explained – there's been a shift in tone, too: "We've brought a darker side of the war to the series. If you load into that battle after [a prolonged siege of attrition] you'll see walls are already damaged, there are some fires already started, buildings already destroyed and – later on – the defenders start to lose people through starvation."

This change in atmosphere fits the setting – the dawn of the Dark Age amidst the rubble of the Roman Empire – as well as having direct effects on how you play the game. Dominique Starr, senior campaign designer, explained further: "I don't think we've represented the consequences of warfare quite so well as we have in this… your men have suffered – the impact on the war on the people fighting for you and the places you're conquering, we've gone out of our way to represent that in a way we haven't before." And it's not just the battles – this is an era of climate change, when the world was getting colder, as lead artist Pawel Wojs told us: "Climate change is a big part of the main story arc. The world is getting colder, so during the course of the campaign you're getting people migrating away from the harsher climate, moving towards Rome, chipping away at the walls." Colder weather means snow, which isn't good for marching armies – everything talked about has direct, measurable in-game effects. It's not just for decoration.

And with this darker approach comes new techniques, like razing your own settlements to the ground, as Gaspar explained: "On the campaign map you can abandon your settlement and use a scorched earth tactic. In the battle map you can burn down whole settlements, causing a huge morale loss to the defenders."

Starr added: "You can deny your enemy the chance to exploit your infrastructure or to rebuild their own. You might find there's a region that isn't particularly useful to you, or it's a massive drain on food because there's too much population – so torch it, use those resources elsewhere and try to cut your losses. That impending doom is something we've really tried to hammer home here – the shit's hit the fan, and there's nothing you can really do about it."

/// Simon Mann, senior battle designer, commented on the thinking behind all of this design: "It's very much a survival-strategy game, for all the different factions in the game. For example: Rome, you've just got to hold on and try to survive, whereas the people like the Saxons are also pushed, they've also got to try and survive." Gaspar was keen to point out, though, that survival isn't an easy ask: "With western Rome in the beginning you have to, essentially, consider what you *can* lose. If you try to keep everything, you will lose everything."

> "In our battles you can essentially have 100,000 soldiers fighting"
> JANOS GASPAR, THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY

So it's darker, more oppressive and harder than it's ever been. But that's before even going into detail on the titular Hun. And once *Total War: Attila*'s 'big bad', as the CA team christened him, starts his ride westwards, things are only going to get harder. Frankly, that can only be good news for a series some feared as recently as last year had lost its way. By going a little darker and reaching out to some of the wider world consequences of war, Creative Assembley is building a *Total War* game on a much bigger geographical and emotional scale than we've ever seen before.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PC
Origin: UK
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Creative Assembly
Release: TBC 2015
Genre: Real-time strategy
Players: 1-TBC

Total War History

It didn't start with *Rome* - it started at *Shogun* - but all roads lead to *Rome: Total War*, the game that put this series on the map. But successive releases haven't been resting on their laurels, and the series has gone from strength to strength.

Developer History

Total War: Rome II **2013 [PC]**
Empire: Total War **2009 [PC]**
Viking: Battle for Asgard **2008 [PC, PS3, 360]**
Shogun: Total War **2000 [PC]**

High Point

Empire: Total War was a massive, epic and engrossing entry. While others had failings, *Empire* stood tall – and it's still great fun to this day.



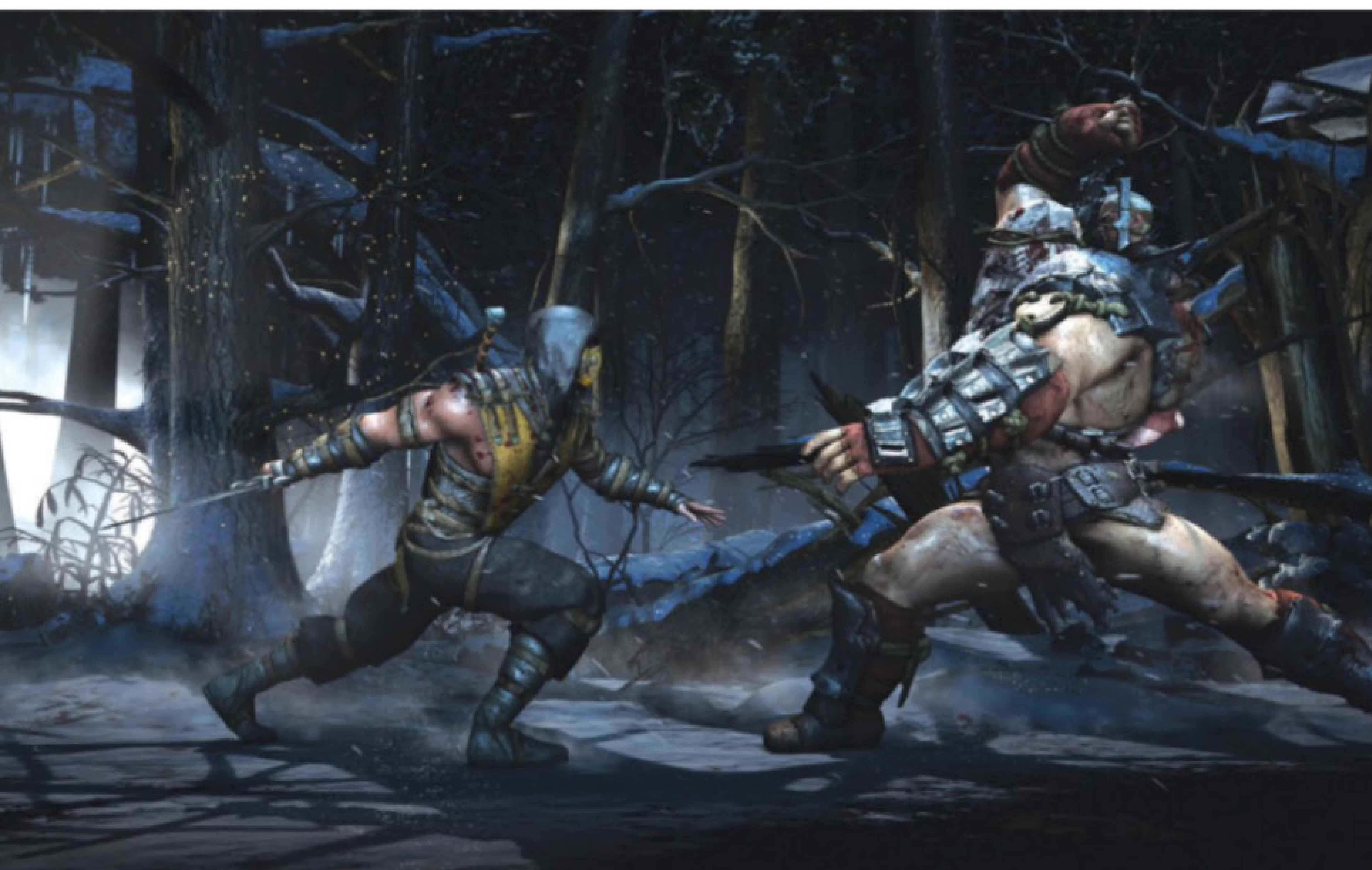


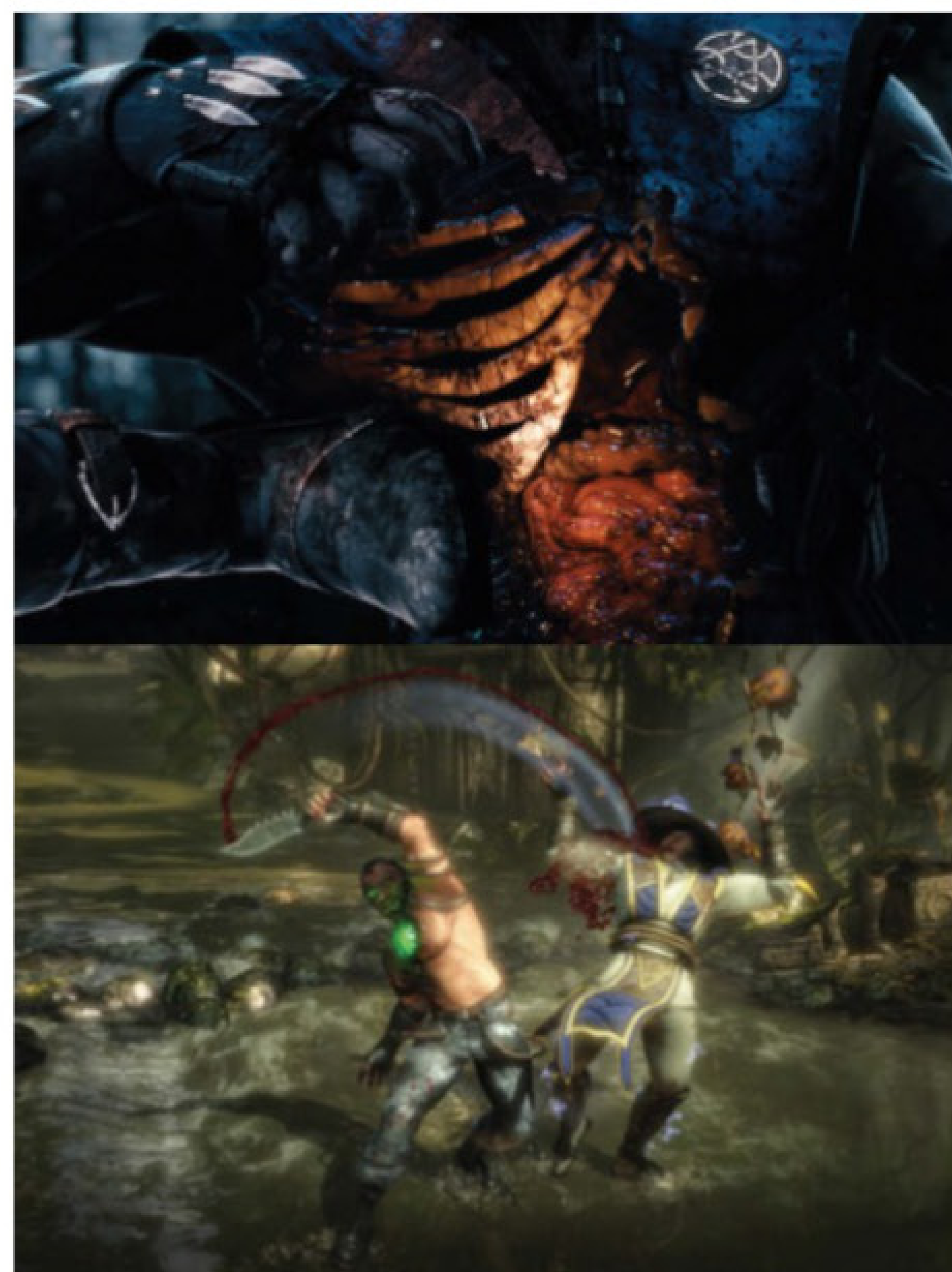
■ Above: Attila is the 'big bad' in the game, but when you start the campaign mode he hasn't even been born yet. His birth signals an increase in the aggression – and fighting ability – of the Huns. Left: Creative Assembly has been looking at Oculus, though it says there's no guarantees this means anything will happen with Attila.

IT'S GONNA BE A RIB-TICKLER

UNSUPRISINGLY, THE (IN)FAMOUS X-Ray moves from *Mortal Kombat* (2011) have been brought back for *X*. "We've brought back the X-Ray moves from *Mortal Kombat 9* because they're too cool not to have," explains Goodman. "On new-gen they're beautiful: vicious, pure awesomeness. You see someone get their neck broken under the skin… but somehow they get back up and fight [laughs]." You won't just have to rely on your super meter to pull the X-Ray moves off this time, either: interactive stages will also have elements you can use to rupture your opponents' internal organs, shatter their ribs, crack their skulls, or do whatever else it is you're into.

Above: The game will run on a modified version of the Unreal Engine 3 and hit 1080p/60FPS on the new-gen consoles. Below: The arenas you can fight in remain 2D, but are interactive this time around.





Above: Kano was recently revealed as a returning character – and from what we've seen of him, the cyborg Aussie seems to have the most varied fighting styles in his variations.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: Multi
Origin: USA
Publisher: Warner Bros Interactive Entertainment
Developer: NetherRealm Studios
Release: Fighting
Genre: 2015
Players: 1-2

Developer Profile

NetherRealm is the result of Midway Games merging with WB Games Chicago back in 2010 after Warner Bros purchased Midway and Surreal Software a year before. The studio is still headed by long-time *Mortal Kombat* project lead Ed Boon after the departure of founding partner John Tobias to Zynga Games.

Developer History

Mortal Kombat
2011 [Multi]
Batman: Arkham City Lockdown
2011 [Android, iOS]
Injustice: Gods Among Us
2013 [Multi]

High Point

The 2011 *Mortal Kombat* reboot was arguably the best version of the game yet, adhering to the classic 2D template, the game introduced new X-Ray moves that were crunchy and satisfying, as well as rebalancing the gameplay fittingly.

Mortal Kombat X

CONCEPT ■ The most brutal, bone-breaking, gratuitously violent fighting game is back in all its bloody glory, featuring a new and improved roster of fighters

It's pronounced 'Ex' not 'Ten', apparently

"*Mortal Kombat* has been around for a long time, so we've brought back classic characters that people love," explains NetherRealm's marketing games manager Brian Goodman during our hands-on with the iconic fighting game, "but we're always looking to be innovative, so we've brought in new characters, too. We've got Cassie Cage, the daughter of Johnny Cage and Sonya Blade, which might give you some ideas about where we're going with the story."

It's a curious start to the presentation – we're used to mostly ignoring the story of fighting games; after a few iterations, it gets hard to justify the countless tournaments that somehow make up the bulk of the game's story. Yet, *Mortal Kombat* always manages to wrangle a pretty good story out of its eclectic cast of fighters – and it always helps when new faces are added to the roster. "D'Vorah is [another] new character. She's a human/insect hybrid that has control over insects and some really incredible moves," explains Goodman as we see the humanoid wasp-thing stab at Scorpion with a set of four sharp, articulated insect-legs unfurling from her thorax. Goodman then selects Ferra Tor and proceeds to make the combined characters perform a move that sees returning combatant Sub-Zero sliced in half from skull to crotch. It's all, instantly, very *Mortal Kombat*. "Ferra Tor is actually two characters in one: a giant beast (Ferra) who has a psychotic lady (Tor) on his back who commands his moves."

Next, Goodman moves onto Kotal Khan, whose imposing tribal design makes us think he's something to do with Shao Khan and his tyrannical dynasty. "Kotal Kahn is a new Outworld fighter who we're keeping quiet about right now so we don't give away too much of the story," Goodman teases – though the Outworld hint adds credence to our Shao Khan theory. One thing we noticed as we got to play the characters ourselves is that none of the new cast seem to have the depth of the returning characters – whether that's because we're not used to them we're not sure, but we hope when we get to learn the intricacies of each fighter, we'll come to see their true depth.

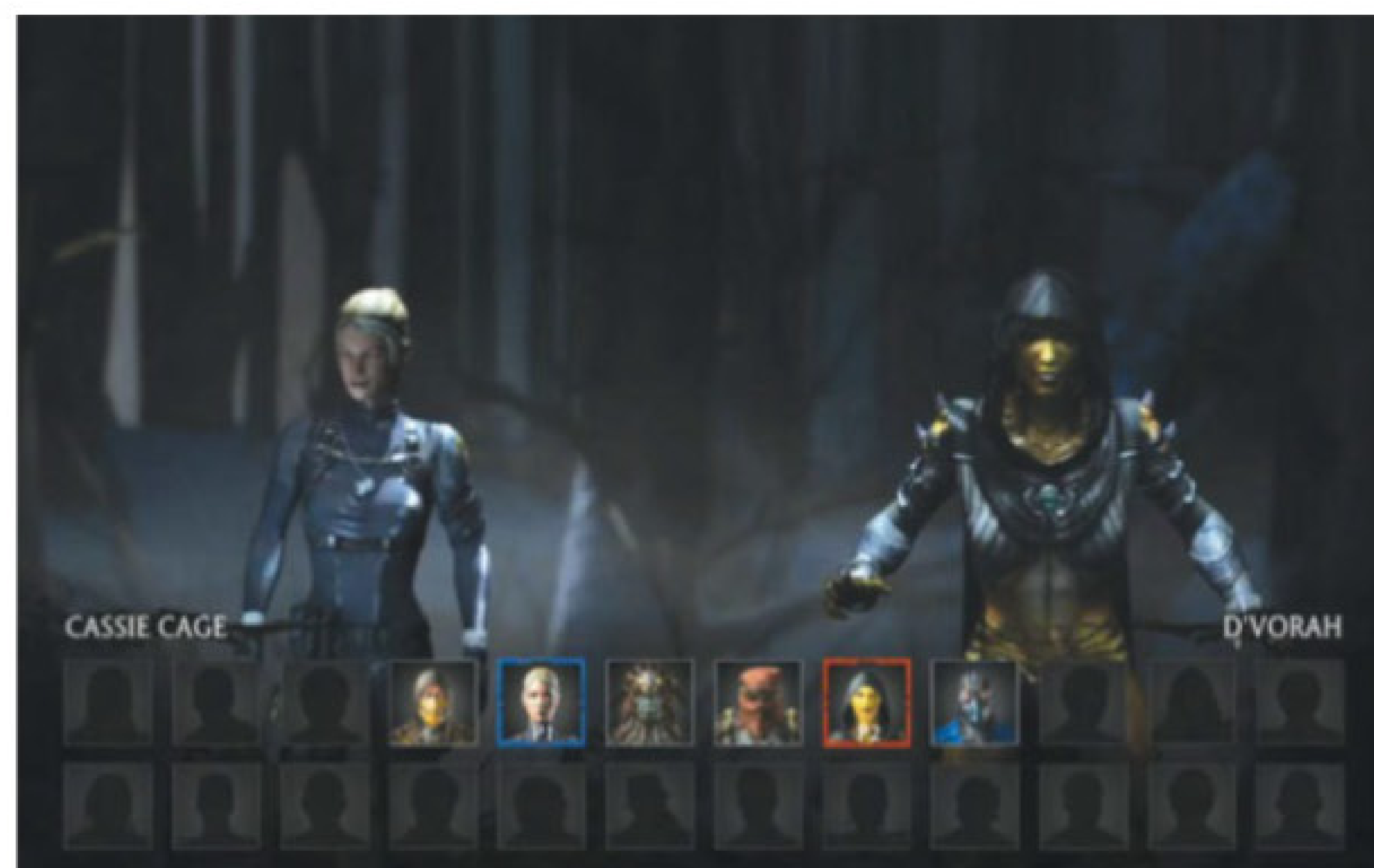
"We've brought back the X-Ray moves from Mortal Kombat 9 because they're too cool not to have"
BRIAN GOODMAN, MARKETING GAMES MANAGER, NETHERREALM

/// Each character now comes with three base variations, too (perhaps another reason we couldn't fully extract each of their unique movesets). Depending on which version of the fighter you choose, different abilities and super moves will be nerfed or boosted. "The first innovation we have [in *Mortal Kombat X*] are 'character variations', which give you three versions of each character when you select them. Each variation has the same basic moveset, but whichever one you choose offers unique special attacks, abilities and strategies. For instance, the Ninjitsu Scorpion variation gives him swords to use, while Hellfire Scorpion gives him more fire-based moves, and Inferno Scorpion makes use of a demon that can be called-in during the fight.

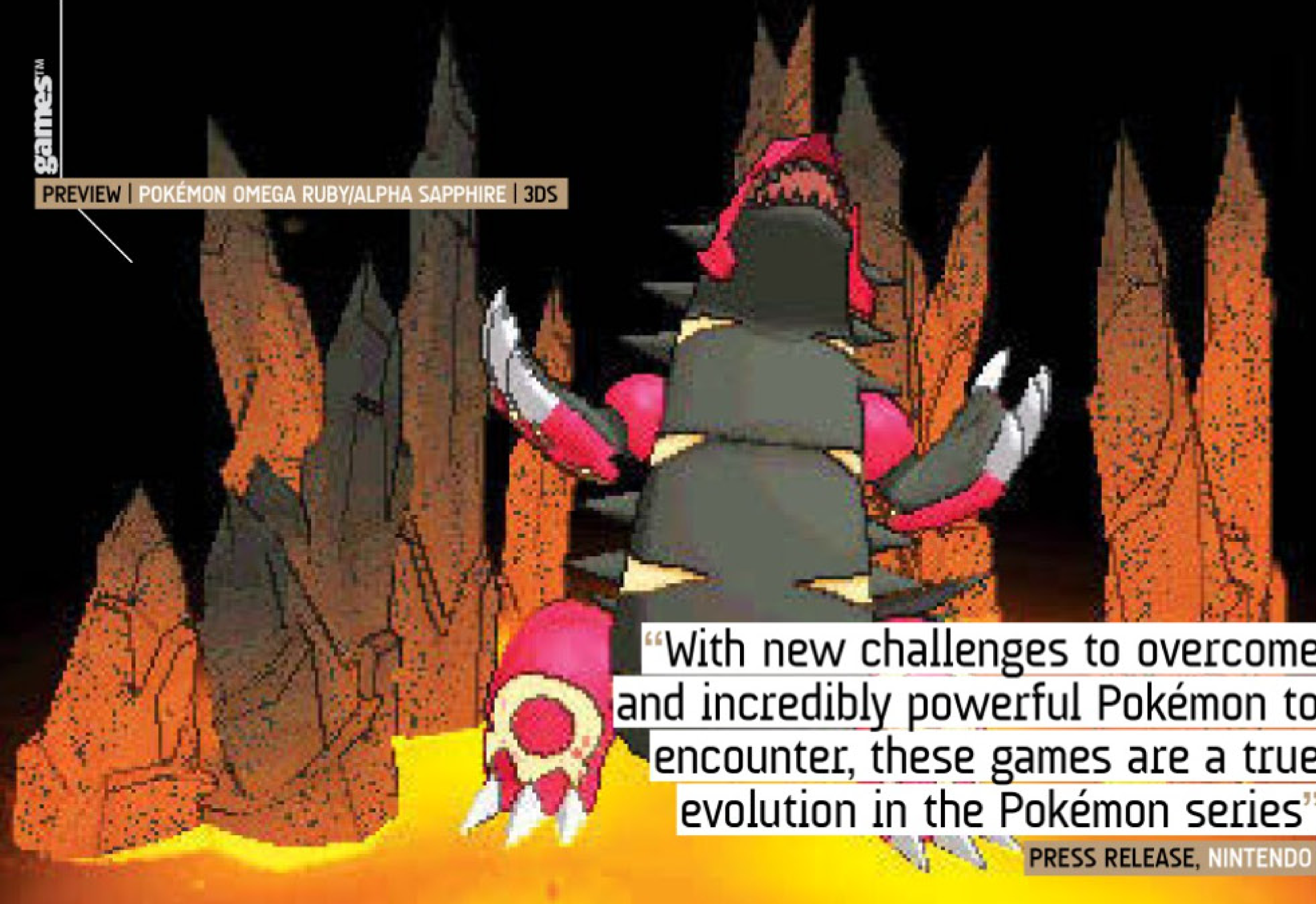
"You can see visually which version you're using," Goodman continues. "If your opponent is using Hellfire Scorpion, you know that because of the flames that are running and licking up his arms. All of the variations have these visual indications. If you're fighting against CryoMaster Sub-Zero, you can see ice covering parts of his body. When you pick a variation you must stick with that for the whole fight: you can't just keep switching variations to match the situation you find yourself in."

It's an interesting conceit to bring to the franchise, and one that's sort-of been trialled before in *Deception*, where you could cycle through different weapons mid-fight. Balancing fighting games is hard enough as it is, so we're eager to see what the full 18-character roster will fell like once you've discovered how each variant of each kombatant plays. *Mortal Kombat X* seems like an incredibly ambitious deviation for NetherRealm – combining all the elements that made the reboot successful with more of that irresistible *Mortal Kombat* über-violence that made the game successful in the first place.





■ Above: The *Mortal Kombat X* roster will apparently feature an exclusive character for each platform – it would be hilarious if Lara Croft was the Xbox One's. Imagine the outrage!



"With new challenges to overcome and incredibly powerful Pokémon to encounter, these games are a true evolution in the Pokémon series"
PRESS RELEASE, NINTENDO



Some of the flavour text has changed since the original releases… Leader Roxanne, for example, seems to be taking her cues from *BioShock*.

Pokémon Omega Ruby/Alpha Sapphire

CONCEPT The Generation III classics are remade for the 3DS, bringing all the 3D wonder of *X* and *Y* to the first Game Boy Advance *Pokémon* games

Hoenn is where the heart is

The fan community has been wanting remakes of the third generation of *Pokémon* games for a good half-decade now, ever since *Pokémon SoulSilver* and *HeartGold*. Honestly, we were unsurprised when the announcement came around – if Game Freak and Nintendo learnt anything from the launch of *Pokémon X* and *Y*, it's that you may as well be printing money when sending out boxed copies of any new Pokémon game. Last year, *X* and *Y*'s launch not only dominated sales charts, but also made 3DS sales skyrocket during the launch window of the PS4 and Xbox One – no mean feat.

After the sixth generation's rampant success, Game Freak has finally decided the time is right to apply the 3D Pokémon models (replacing the ol' faithful sprites) retroactively to *Ruby* and *Sapphire*. The games will be released simultaneously worldwide – the idea is that trainers will be playing through at roughly the same pace, renewing the focus on trading and social battling, which worked well with *X* and *Y*.

The game will also introduce a few new elements, as you'd expect. For a start, new Pokémon will be seeing Mega-Evolutions (most notably; Salamence, Altaria, Swampert, Sceptile and, uh, Slowbro) while the game will also introduce 'Primal' forms for legendary Pokémon Groudon and Kyogre. We're confident this will manifest as stat-boosts, and result in Team Aqua and Magma doubling down on their efforts to subdue the land- and water-based monsters.

The game, set in the Hoenn region – complete with its forest-top cities, floating villages, cosmic observatories and volcanoes – will bring back the fan-favourite Pokémon Contests, too. This time around, though, trainers can buy and equip outfits depending on the style of contest they're entering in (a replacement for the trainer customisation that seems to have been dropped since *X* and *Y*). There's also a cosplay option for Pikachu, weirdly, but we're waiting to see if other members of your team will have access to these strange costumes, too, or if it's a privilege reserved for the iconic Pokémon mascot alone.

As is to be expected with any new entry in the *Pokémon* franchise, expect the meta-game rebalanced (hopefully we'll see Mega Kangaskhan get nerfed) and we're still waiting to see a slew of new Megas make an appearance, alongside some potential new Primals (unlikely, but Primal Rayquaza would look incredible). We also wonder if *Pokémon Alpha* and *Omega* will be compatible with the newly announced *Pokkén Fighters* – the fighting game developed by the studio behind *Tekken* – and if you'll be able to import your team to the game for some one-on-one combat… it seems unlikely, but we can dream.



The secret bases make a return, but with 3DS connectivity and more customisation; you can pretty much make your own Gym.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: 3DS
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Game Freak
Release: 28 November 2014
Genre: RPG
Players: 1-4

Developer Profile

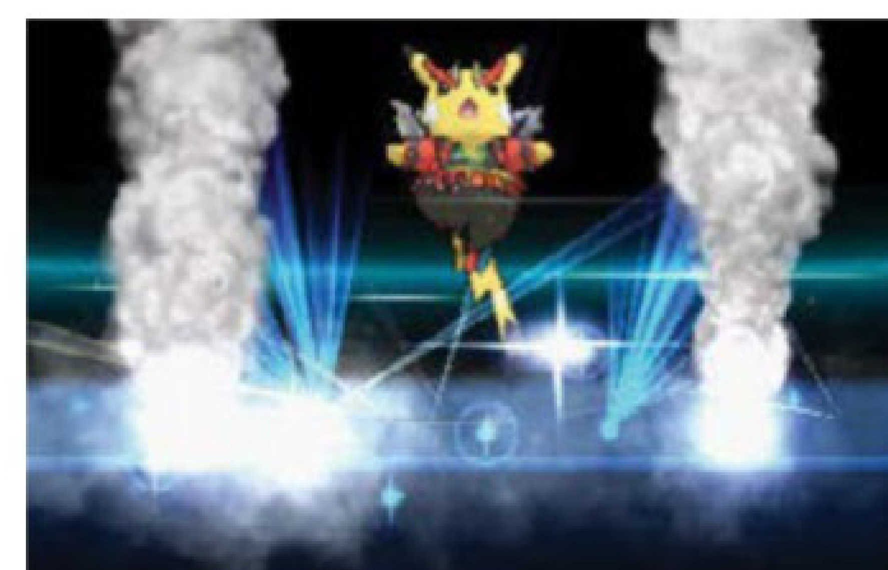
Game Freak is mostly known for its extensive work on the *Pokémon* franchise, but has also developed games outside of its flagship franchise for formats as far back as the NES. Game Freak is a privately owned company and not directly under Nintendo's control, contrary to popular belief.

Developer History

Mario & Yoshi
1991 [NES]
Pokemon Red/Blue
1996 [Game Boy Colour]
HarmoKnight
2012 [3DS]

High Point

Pokémon Red and *Blue* turned a whole generation of gamers onto the RPG with its accessible and immediately familiar mechanics and goals.



We only played the beta of the game, but even in the in-progress release, the water effects were one of the strongest visual elements of the game. We're assured they'll look even better on release.





BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD

WORLD OF WARSHIPS will include ships that never actually made it to the water, according to what a representative of Wargaming told us. Apparently, Wargaming has been given access to the blueprints for different ships from around the world that were never actually built, whether that was due to financial problems or because the war had been declared over by the time the plans were signed off. Included in the blueprints is a flotilla of Jamaican warships, alongside plans to keep introducing new countries, maps and warships for at least a year after the game's launch.

Above: The game's UI might seen a little intimidating at first, but after about 30 minutes you can make sense of most on-screen elements. We were most impressed with the nautical reticule and the way the multiple guns lined up within it. Right: There's a satisfying thud with every explosion, and you have to keep an eye out for all deadly projectiles heavy with that fiery threat.





World Of Warships

CONCEPT ■ The 'World Of' trilogy's final component, *World Of Warships* will take the massive online franchise onto the waves, pitting battleship against battleship in gigantic navel battles.

Whatever floats your boat

A lot of people have driven tanks – or at least know enough about them to know when they're moving like they're supposed to. In a lot of war movies or documentaries, you see tanks in action – see how they crest hills trying to get the best vantage points, how they attempt to outflank opposing forces, how they try to subdue enemy infantry with suppressing fire. Warships, though… they're different. It's not too often you get to see those in action, so creating a game that revolves exclusively around naval warfare posed an interesting challenge for the developers at Wargaming's Lesta Studio.

The biggest chunk of development revolved around recreating each of the ships – mostly because the art team behind the game has committed itself to making each ship model as historically accurate as possible. "All ships' models are made in correspondence with numerous references," explains Wargaming's head of publishing, Mike Fedorov. "We have a dedicated team of historical consulters onsite and all over the world, offering their expertise to [the art department]. Our 3D modellers base their work on real blueprints, photos, archive data, and videos for each particular ship collected from all possible sources. A single ship model can contain up to 500,000 polygons, and can take up to six months to fully render in 3D."

Considering the game is launching with two factions (Japanese and US), and will feature 75 different ships on release day, the development team has clearly sunk a lot of time into cementing the game's historical accuracy. "We don't want to compromise what we see as such an important part of the game," explains Fedorov when we ask him about the typical Wargaming player – those that play for a mix of military action and historical representation. "A single model can contain a few thousand elements, and we want to have them all visible, even at the closest [camera angles]."

/// It's clear that Wargaming is devoted to recreating as mush realism as it can when it comes to the visual representation of the historical elements of its game, but when it comes to combat, the reality suffers. Where *World Of Tanks* sits somewhere between arcade-action and battlefield simulator, *World Of Warships* is taking the more 'gamey' approach – the studio using realism as a guideline, not a goal. We had an extended hands-on with the game's beta build, and the difference the game has to its land- and sky-bound brethren is immediately noticeable

> "We have a dedicated team of historical consulters on site and all over the world"
>
> MIKE FEDOROV, HEAD OF PUBLISHING, WARGAMING

For a start, angling your battleship to deal the most damage from its port and starboard canons requires a certain amount of forward thinking – there's no twitch gaming here, no reflex based killing. It's much more considered in its pace, and battles tend to start up straight away. We mostly played with destroyer ships, sending our scout planes out to get a better vantage on battle while raining fire down on ships attempting to flank our team's aircraft carrier. We found it much easier to try and anticipate a flotilla's movements and set ourselves up to combat them, but then, we were playing against 'bots (for the purposes of the beta).

When you populate the game with the 15v15 players each of the six launch maps can accommodate, we anticipate a much more chess-like scenario playing out. The ships handle as you'd expect – slow and steady – but can soak up huge volumes of damage before disintegrating, so you've got to weigh up whether or not you'll be able to fire off a worthy load of salvos before the enemy forces you to retreat. Fittingly, it plays like a game of virtual battleships, and once you get the firing arc nailed down, you'll be able to pepper enemy formations with far-ranging projectiles without too much trouble.

We're excited to see how *World Of Warships* operates with full servers – from what we've played so far, it's clear Wargaming is aiming to make this a very different experience from what we've seen in *Tanks* or *Warplanes*. You know what they say, though; third time's a charm.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PC
Origin: RUSSIA
Publisher: Wargaming
Developer: In-house
Release: MMO-action
Genre: 2014
Players: 2-30

Developer Profile

Founded in 1998, Wargaming was conceived for the purpose of creating multiplayer strategy games for the PC. Fast-forward to 2010, and Wargaming's almost instant dominance of the action-MMO genre was well underway.

Developer History

World of Tanks **2010 [PC, Xbox 360]**
World of Warplanes **2013 [PC]**
World of Tanks Blitz **2014 [iOS]**

High Point

Wargaming demonstrated its understanding of the free-to-play market perfectly with *World Of Tanks* – doing so before many others even considered it viable.





■ Above: Want a better view at that ridiculous hull-shot you just pulled off? You can either manually zoom in to see it, or hit Z to track your missiles in real-time. Left: The aircraft carrier is the hub of your team, and the game mode we played had us all rally to protect one aircraft carrier until it docked at an objective marker.



Until Dawn

CONCEPT ■ Akin to an interactive *Friday The 13th* movie, you decide who lives or dies as a bunch of randy teenagers head into the woods...

Five things you need to know about the horrifying PS4 exclusive

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PlayStation 4
Origin: UK
Publisher: Sony
Developer: Supermassive Games
Release: TBA 2015
Genre: Survival-horror
Players: 1

Developer Profile

Based in the prosperous climes of Guildford in the heart of Surrey, Supermassive Games is relatively fresh-faced, making the list of 'Best New Studio' at the Develop Awards 2011. The studio's work includes *Doctor Who: The Eternity Clock*, Wonderbook title *Walking With Dinosaurs*, and *Start The Party! Save The World*.

Developer History

Walking With Dinosaurs
2013 [PlayStation 3]

Start the Party! Save the World
2011 [PlayStation 3]

Doctor Who: The Eternity Clock
2012 [Multi]

Start The Party!
2010 [PlayStation 3]

High Point

While Supermassive Games hasn't worked on anything that matches the scale of Until Dawn, the studio's debut *Start The Party!* was a decent party title to coincide with the release of PlayStation Move.

Developers appear to be pretty determined to scare the crap out of players right now. It's a trend we'll see hit the mainstream this month with the release of *Alien: Isolation*, and then there's impending arrival of *Silent Hills* after the bone-chilling *P.T.* demo. Horror isn't so much creeping out of the shadows right now, but bursting through the front door and charging towards you wielding a meat cleaver. Now Sony is getting into the act with PlayStation 4 exclusive *Until Dawn* directed by hitherto unknown studio Supermassive Games, tossing players into a claustrophobic environment where you control a group of tormented teenagers trying to survive the night with a killer on the loose. The decisions you make throughout the game will decide who lives and who dies, as you try to survive until, well, dawn. Will you make it through the night alive? Well, first let's go through some of the basics...

1 WHO IS SUPERMASSIVE GAMES?

A small developer based in the south east of the UK, Supermassive Games has established a decent track record with Sony over the past few years, developing party titles for the PlayStation Move launch, Wonderbook, and contributing to other titles (the developer designed a few levels in *LittleBigPlanet* Vita and ported the original *Killzone* to PS3). There's no question that *Until Dawn* is the studio's biggest undertaking to date, and will finally cast the spotlight on the modest developer and elevate it to the ranks of triple-A game design in a big way.

1





2

"Through the course of the night, anyone can live, anyone can die, and things aren't always what they seem."
PRESS RELEASE, SUPERMASSIVE GAMES




3


4


5







2 BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD

You might have heard of *Until Dawn* before its announcement in August. Unveiled a couple of years back as a PlayStation Move motion-sensing game, Sony later shelved the idea, demanding a redesign. Motion control still plays an integral role but now, arriving on the PlayStation 4, it'll use the DualShock 4 motion sensor – used to shine your flashlight to illuminate ominous shadows, or, in one of the numerous setpieces where you must make a vital decision, point it at your choice.

3 IT USES KILLZONE: SHADOW FALL'S ENGINE

And you can see the difference, particularly in the expressiveness of the character animations. Performance capture was heavily utilised, with Supermassive calling in the talents of notable US television actors – Brett Dalton (*Agents Of S.H.I.E.L.D.*) and Hayden Panettiere (*Heroes*) – to voice and mo-cap the entirety of the game's story. It's a feat made even more impressive when considering the sheer volume of story, with multiple deviating narrative strands that splinter off depending on the decisions you make during the campaign.

4 THE NEXT HEAVY RAIN

It's not a surprise that *Until Dawn* is being compared to David Cage's *Heavy Rain* and *Beyond: Two Souls*, as it prioritises its narrative ambitions within a confined series of interactive scenes. Here, the story hinges on the concept of the 'butterfly effect', where a tiny choice can have radical ramifications. Specifically, the decisions that you make through the game can result in anyone or everyone dying. So instead of yelling at hapless teens in horror films, you can see how well your own survival instincts hold up.

5 IT'S ACTUALLY SCARY

That really shouldn't need to be a highlight of a horror game, but it's worth mentioning. Most of this is down to the outstanding cinematic presentation, not to mention the high-quality facial animation, with no horror cliché going unexplored. But we've also seen some genuine moments of intense psychological horror, not to mention a generous portion of gore. If it manages to stretch its frights beyond generic jump scares and offer some truly unsettling imagery, then *Silent Hills* might have some serious competition when both arrive next year. 





Inset: Although it's all recognisable and domestic, we wonder if the game will be laced with the same sense of the uncanny that genre peer *Gone Home* was.



Inset: The slightly stylised art direction makes the game look interesting – it's an almost cartoony take on real-life, that rounded edge evoking the sense of passing time the game is based around.



Life Is Strange

CONCEPT ■ A quiet student with a passion for photography is unwittingly brought into a domestic mystery, which you'll have to solve episode by episode

These Things Take Time

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PS3, PS4, Xbox One, PC
Origin: France
Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Dontnod Entertainment
Release: TBA 2015
Genre: Adventure
Players: 1

Developer Profile

Dontnod is an independent studio operating out of Paris, France and set up by former Criterion studio head, Oskar Guilbert. The studio received funding towards its first release – the third-person narrative labyrinth *Remember Me* – from Capcom, but the studio lists itself as independent.

Developer History

Remember Me
2013 [PS3, Xbox 360, PC]

High Point

Remember Me was praised for its inventive world design, ambitious narrative direction and the way it formed an intimate relationship with the player through innovative storytelling devices.

***Life Is Strange* sounds like a Stephen King novel mixed with last year's exploration game dark horse *Gone Home*.** The second game from Dontnod will see the player slip into the shoes of a high school senior called Max Caulfield, returning to her hometown of Arcadia Bay, Oregon for the first time in five years. After reuniting with the clashing personality of her old school friend Chloe, she quickly realises that something's not quite right about Arcadia Bay, and sets out on a journey to uncover the truth behind the disappearance of another old friend.

We caught up with Dontnod's creative director, Jean-Maxine Morris, to talk about what drove the studio to make *Life Is Strange*, and pick apart the metaphors at the game's core.

Where did the inspiration behind *Life Is Strange* come from?

Much of what we did on *Remember Me* was related to time manipulation and memories and we basically started to ask ourselves again: what can we do with these ideas and themes? That's really where the basic idea came from.

Then we iterated on that and asked ourselves how we make the best game possible, because *Remember Me* wasn't the success we hoped it would be. That's why we decided to concentrate more heavily on the narrative aspects and opt for an episodic structure.

The story has been through some very heavy tweaking since we first began, and we were constantly brainstorming different plots, settings and characters. It has now been stable for a quite a while, so we're taking that as a good sign.

***Remember Me* was very combat heavy. Has it been liberating to move away from that and concentrate more on narrative?**

I wouldn't describe it as liberating, no. I think the world can actually be divided into two sets of people: the people that 'got' *Remember Me*'s

> "Basically, we're going for a Telltale type of experience with a Gone Home kind of mood and tone to it"
>
> CARSTEN LINDER, SENIOR PRODUCER

combat and those that didn't. It's my fault that some people didn't get the combat, but I was actually very happy with what we offered in that game. We just presented it to the player in the wrong way.

One day I'd like to revisit a game with combat, but *Life Is Strange* is a chance for us to do something different. This is us focusing on what we did well in *Remember Me*, which is the art, narrative, characters and overall themes. We're also excited about the episodic structure.

I don't feel bad that there's no combat like that in *Life Is Strange*, it's just a different kind of game.

How do you make the choices in the game meaningful when you can rewind time and try all of the options first?

That's something we thought about very early on in the design process. Basically, we're going for a Telltale type of experience with a *Gone Home* kind of mood and tone to it... although Gone Home came out after we started working on *Life Is Strange*.

It sounds cool to be able to rewind time and change your mind about things that you've already done, but very soon you realise that it might allow you to cheat the game and render your decisions meaningless. The way we get around that is we use short, medium and long-term sequences that see the choices you made combine with each other in interesting and surprising ways. Something that looks positive and seems to fix a short-term goal, for example, can actually end up being bad in the middle or long term.

That doesn't mean all seemingly 'good' choices will end up being bad, because that would be silly and predictable in itself. We're just trying to include a very wide variety of outcomes that makes it difficult for the audience to accurately predict what is going to happen. Really, we want to keep the player guessing about what is to come further into the game.

It seems that *Life Is Strange*'s time mechanic is a metaphor for teenagers feeling insecure in themselves and wanting to have a second chance at their decisions...

That's exactly right, actually. Becoming an adult involves, to a large extent, learning to make, and stand by, your choices in life... whatever the outcome might be.

In the game, Max can choose to rewind time and try different things to make different decisions, but the bigger picture is certainly more about her coming to terms with the fact that eventually you must stand by your choices and you can't simply expect to keep getting second chances. It's those choices that ultimately make you who you are and that's what the game is about.



Inset: While you play as a diligent and thoughtful young woman, you're paired with an impulsive old school mate, Chloe. We just hope it ends up being less sitcom-esque than it sounds.

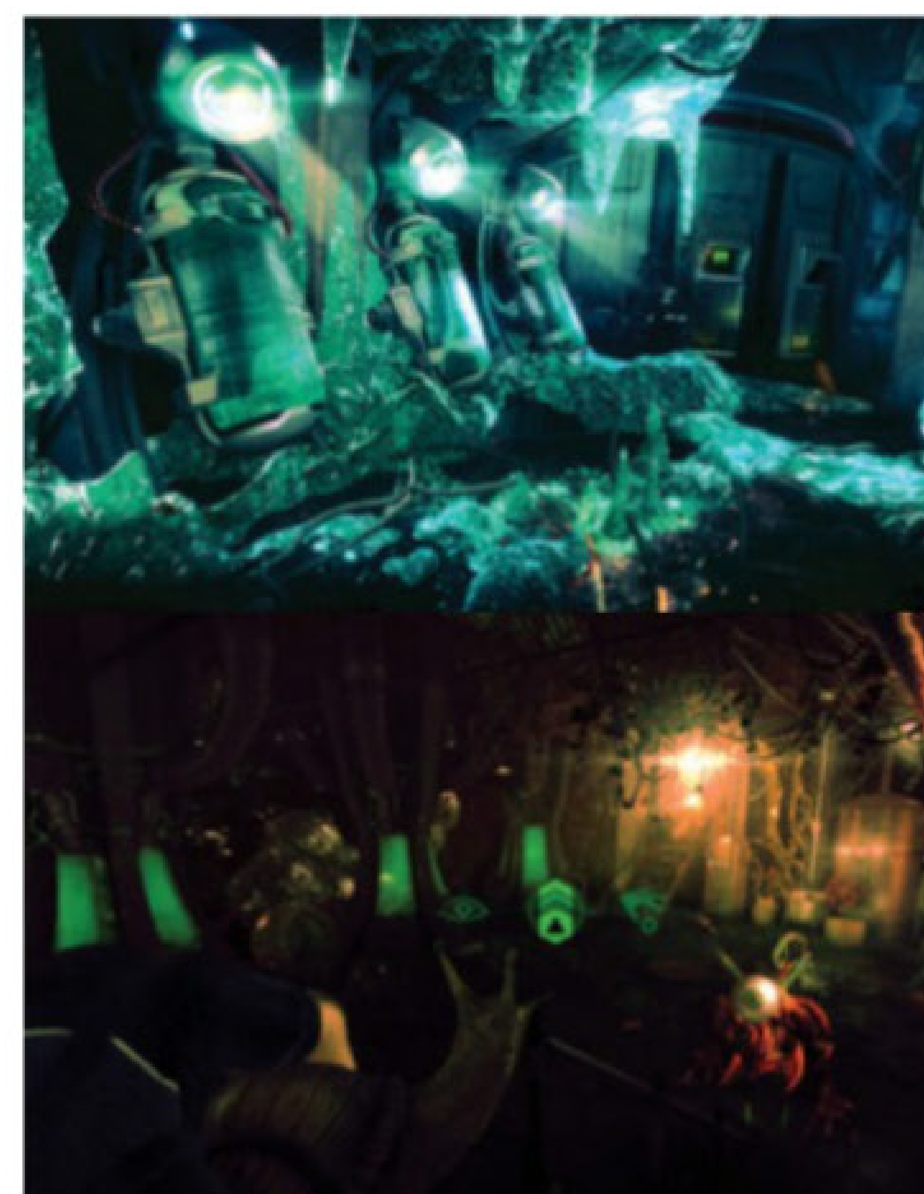
Inset: From what we've seen, each character fits on a different end of the personality triangle. We hope the intricacies of each character carry the same legitimacy Nilin did in *Remember Me*.

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

THE KEY line of connection between *Remember Me* and *Life Is Strange* will be its time rewinding mechanic. It was one of the strongest features of Dontnod's last game and one we're looking forward to experimenting with this time around. In *Life Is Strange*, it will allow you to hit rewind after making puzzle-breaking errors or just to see what a different choice might lead you to. For instance placing a ladder to reach an object may cause others to fall and break. Rewinding time can fix that for you. However, much like *The Walking Dead*, seemingly 'good' decisions won't always lead to what you expect.



"Fight for your survival as you close in on the secrets that lie hidden in the darkness..."
PRESS RELEASE, MERGE GAMES



Various icons tell you what you can and can't do, while a quick press of the right mouse button will place something back in your inventory.

Albedo: Eyes From Outer Space

CONCEPT Albedo is an interesting mishmash of two-distinct genres, the point-and-click adventure and first-person shooter. It does one far better than the other

Can Merge Games' Fifties-inspired homage become the next Half-Life?

There's no denying the ambition of Fabrizio Zagaglia. The 29-year-old Italian has spent three years working on a labour of love that boasts an interesting Fifties-styled setting and draws heavy inspiration from the likes of *Half-Life* and *The Secret Of Monkey Island*. While the early access beta we've played suggests that Zagaglia is unlikely to match either groundbreaking game, there's no denying that *Albedo* certainly does its best to subvert the well-known genres that it draws most of its inspiration from.

This in part is mainly down to the introduction of the Temporal Dilation Tool. It's a neat, weird-looking device that effectively allows you to see into the future, giving you an idea of what may happen. Point it on a broken dumbwaiter for example and you'll be able to see that it houses an item beneath it that you'll need to gain access to in order to progress. While it can be argued that most point-and-click adventures only show the items that you'll need to interact with, it's still nice to see an engaging way of implementing such a well-used mechanic.



There are a variety of puzzles on offer in *Albedo*, but some of them are rather fiddly.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PC, Mac
Origin: Italy
Publisher: Merge Games
Developer: Z4g0 and Ivan Venturi Productions
Release: 26 September
Genre: Action-Adventure
Players: 1

Developer Profile

Italian-born Fabrizio Zagaglia has been creating games for the past 12 years from the age of 17. Currently 29, he's already found success in the Italian indie community thanks to the likes of A Time Odyssey and Dot. He also created Longy, a 2D action adventure whose hero, John T Longy, appears in Albedo.

Developer History

A Time Odyssey **2001 [PC]**
Longy **2002 [PC]**
Dot **2010 [PC]**
Syder Arcade **2013 [PC]**

High Point

Syder Arcade was created while Zagaglia was at Studio Evil and is currently available on Mac and PC. It's a solid multi-directional side scrolling shooter that pays tribute to the arcade classics of yesteryear.

Each section of the research centre John finds himself on is effectively a puzzle itself, meaning it's impossible to progress before you've solved it, saving the annoying back-tracking found in other examples of the genre. Less impressive, however, are the pure puzzles. They can range from unlocking doors to pulling batteries from slime-filled radios, but it's not always clear what you're supposed to be doing.

Point-and-click adventures typically come with slick interfaces and *Albedo* looks to be no different. A simple swipe of the mouse wheel selects any item in your inventory, while a quick downward stroke of the mouse selects it. Once selected, you can combine, use or look at it with a quick direction movement. It's a little clumsy at times, but still works surprisingly well. Less effective however is the combat, which descends into mindless mouse stabbing as you hit the Fifties-inspired aliens with wrenches, screwdrivers and anything else you have to hand. It feels unwieldy and unnatural and it's hard to say how much damage you're doing and what inflictions are being dealt upon yourself. You'll stick with it, though, because while the Unity 3D engine is rather rough around the edges, *Albedo* is packed with interesting ideas and the odd touch of humour – points far too many triple-A games seem to forget nowadays. 



SHOWCASE

MORE TITLES TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

POKKÉN TOURNAMENT

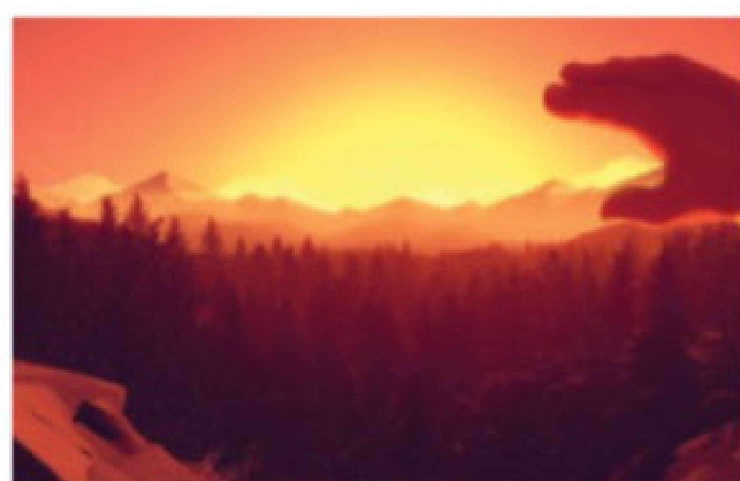
Format: **Arcade**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **Bandai Namco**
ETA: **TBA 2015**



THE TITLE makes no sense, and neither does the concept. Nevertheless, *Pokkén Tournament* is a real thing. Developed by Bandai Namco under the gaze of *Tekken* head honcho Katsuhiro Harada, it throws Nintendo's pocket monsters into a 3D fighting arena to duke it out. While it has only been confirmed for Japanese arcades, expect this to arrive on a Nintendo console in Western territories at some point in the future.

FIREWATCH

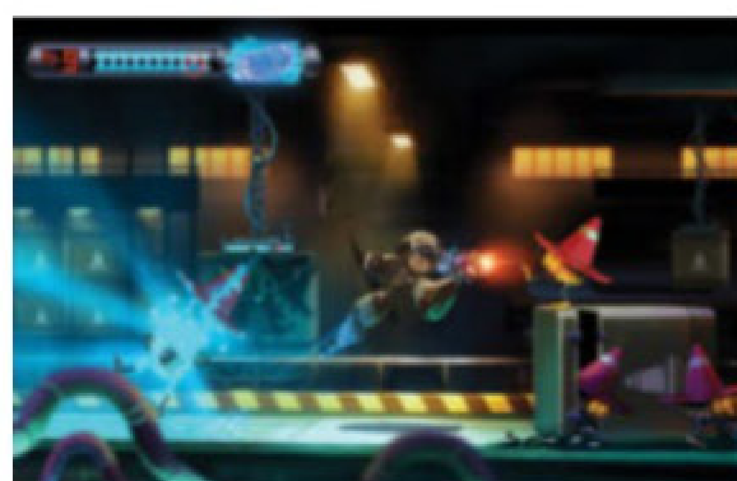
Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Campo Santo**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **TBA 2015**



THE FRESHMAN effort from indie start-up Campo Santo now has some gameplay footage. You play a man named Henry, who roams the forest he's hired to observe. However, mysterious events occur that unsettle his mental state, causing a rift with his supervisor, Delilah. The art style looks like a cross between *Team Fortress 2* and *Journey*, making it one of the most visually arresting titles for 2015 that we've seen so far.

MIGHTY NO.9

Format: **Multi**
Publisher: **Comcept**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **April 2015**



HANDS-ON impressions of Keiji Inafune's spiritual successor to *Mega Man* are that, well, it's just like *Mega Man*. However, there's one feature that distinguishes it from its forerunner, and that's in the form of Xel – the energy source contained inside enemies that endows the players with abilities. It certainly gives the formula a refreshing twist that will assure *Mega Man* fans that Inafune isn't resting on fan service, determined to do something different.

RESIDENT EVIL REVELATIONS 2

Format: **Multi**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **Early 2015**



AFTER MUCH speculation and leaks, Capcom finally announced *Resident Evil Revelations 2*, the sequel to its 2012 3DS spin-off heading to most major platforms. Not a lot is known other than it won't star Chris Redfield and Jill Valentine as the leads. Instead, it will introduce new characters in a fresh setting. No gameplay has been shown, but it's the same development team as *Revelations*, with an early 2015 release date slated for Japan.

BAND SAGA

Format: **PC, iOS**
Publisher: **Rekcahdam**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **TBA 2015**



YET TO meet its Kickstarter goal at the time of writing, *Band Saga* is a combination of *Mega Man*-esque action game, rogue-like platformer and music title, where you use an arm-cannon to blast enemies in space. The soundtrack is already completed, with artists featured in *Fez* and *Plants Vs Zombies* contributing. If it reaches its funding goal, expect it to arrive late next year.

NEVER ALONE

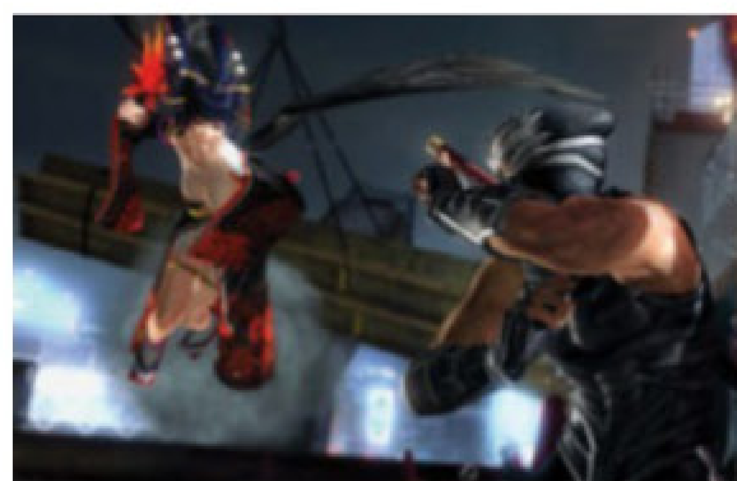
Format: **Multi**
Publisher: **E-Line**
Developer: **Upper One Games**
ETA: **4 November**



UPPER ONE Games, a studio of native Alaskans, is nearing the release of its debut title. The story of an Iñupiaq girl named Nuna and her fox, the narrative is centred around Alaskan folklore, with players able to control Nuna and the fox in single and multiplayer. From what we've seen, it's a visually spectacular series of challenges, puzzles and animals that offers an intimate glimpse into another way of life.

DEAD OR ALIVE 5: LAST ROUND

Format: **Multi**
Publisher: **Tecmo Koei**
Developer: **Team Ninja**
ETA: **Early 2015**



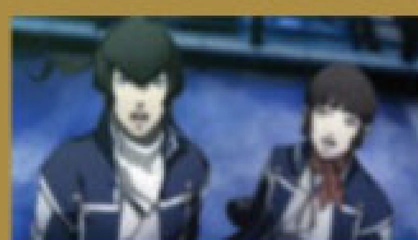
WHAT IS presumed to be the last iteration of Team Ninja's *Dead Or Alive 5*, this features an expanded roster of fighters. Those appearing include characters such as Ryu and Akira, Pai and others from the *Virtua Fighter* series. Originally thought to be a PS4 and Xbox One retail re-release, it'll be hitting last-gen platforms, as well as a digital download that'll support all previously released DLC.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: DANGER OF THE OOZE

Format: **3DS, PS3, Xbox 360**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **WayForward Technologies**
ETA: **Autumn 2014**



TO COINCIDE with the cinematic reboot (and not to be confused with the similar-sounding 1991 live-action film), this is a 2D platformer coming out before the end of the year. Sometimes good, oftentimes mediocre developer WayForward Technologies (*Silent Hill: Book Of Memories* and *BloodRayne: Betrayal*) are at the helm, once again flexing their retro muscle on another popular licensed property.



DELAYED -Shin Megami Tensei 4 (3DS)

3DS RPG *Shin Megami Tensei 4* has been delayed by a few weeks, pushing back the long-awaited title to the end of October. Check back next issue for a full review of the game.

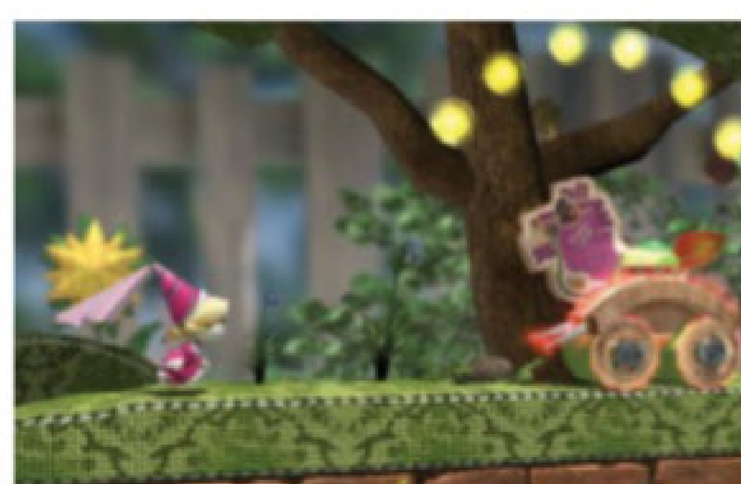


DELAYED – Assassin's Creed Unity (Multi)

November is a busy month for Ubisoft, especially now *Assassin's Creed Unity* has been pushed back to 13 November – meaning it'll be out the same day as last-gen *Creed, Rogue*.

RUN SACKBOY! RUN!

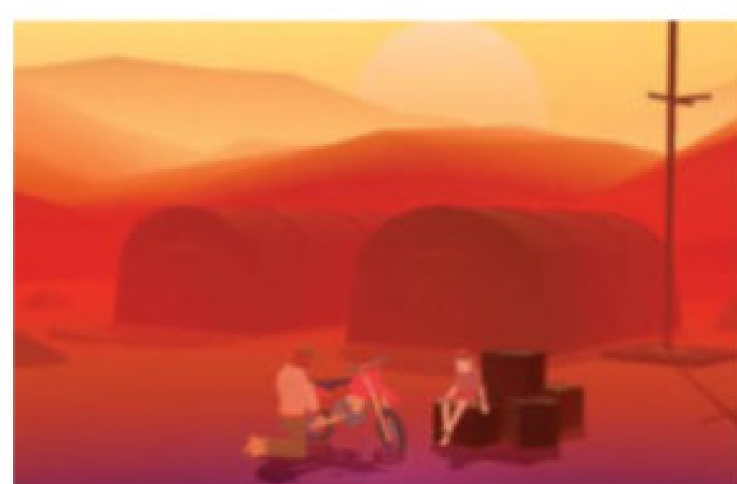
Format: **Mobile**
Publisher: **Sony**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **October 2014**



BEATING LITTLEBIGPLANET 3 to the punch by a few weeks, Sony has recently announced *Run Sackboy! Run!* as the next *LittleBigPlanet* title. An endless runner, players can guide Sackboy through a series of familiar locations collecting bubbles and stickers, using jet packs and gliders to earn high scores. There's also additional benefits for those looking to pick up *LittleBigPlanet 3*, as you can earn costumes for the threequel.

THE SUN ALSO RISES

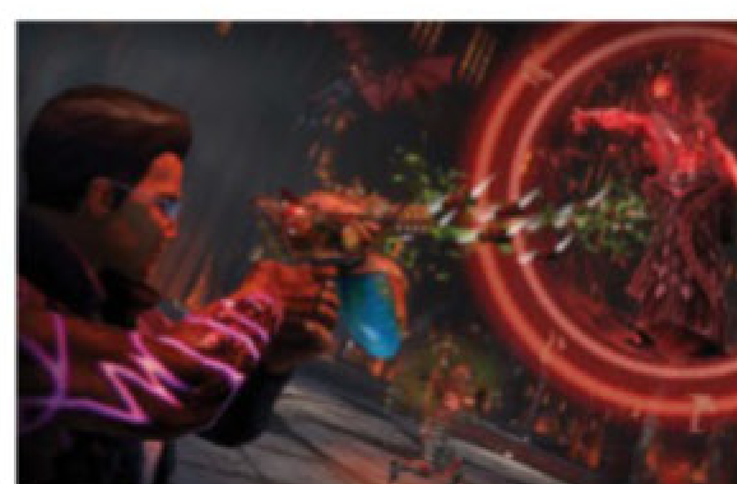
Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Horse Volume**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **October 2015**



RECENTLY SECURING its Kickstarter funding goal, Horse Volume's debut explores the War on Terror from both the perspective of the US soldiers and the Afghan citizens. Interestingly, it's pitched as an interactive narrative adventure, only featuring asymmetrical multiplayer. The art direction is striking, and the title has attracted a number of artists, like Edinburgh University professor Rhonda Matthews and *Salad Fingers* creator David Firth.

SAINTS ROW: GAT OUT OF HELL

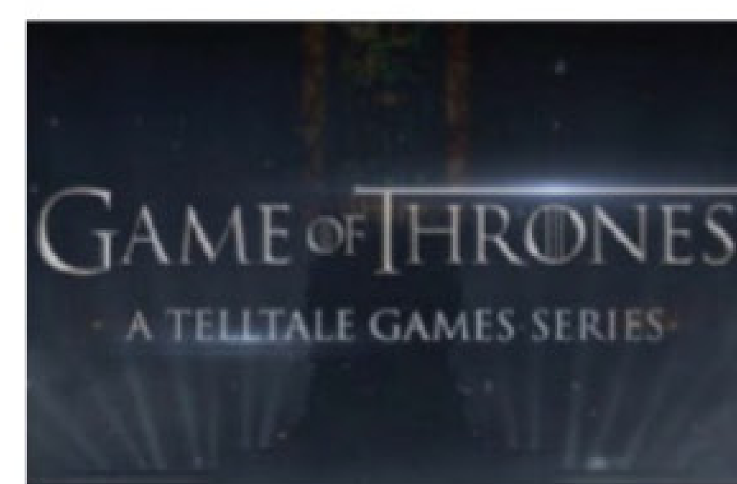
Format: **Multi**
Publisher: **Deep Silver**
Developer: **Volition**
ETA: **27 January**



A STANDALONE expansion to *Saints Row IV* heading to last and current-gen consoles, Johnny Gat and the Saints head to Hell in search of Satan, who has kidnapped their leader.
But the lantern-jawed bro won't be ill-equipped: A La-Z-Boy armed with mini-guns, angel wings to enable him to fly and seven weapons, each based on a sin, will aid Gat's righteous quest to bring his own brand of disorder and carnage to the Devil and his pals.

GAME OF THRONES

Format: **Multi**
Publisher: **Telltale Games**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **TBA 2015**



TELLTALE GAMES is still keeping its cards firmly against its iron-clad chest when it comes to its adaptation of HBO's television series. Still, a couple of clues have recently been dropped by the developer. A Twitter post strongly suggests that players will take on the role of a background character from the Forrester clan (pledged to the Starks), while the hashtag 'IronFromIce' potentially points towards the title of the series.

DRAGON QUEST HEROES

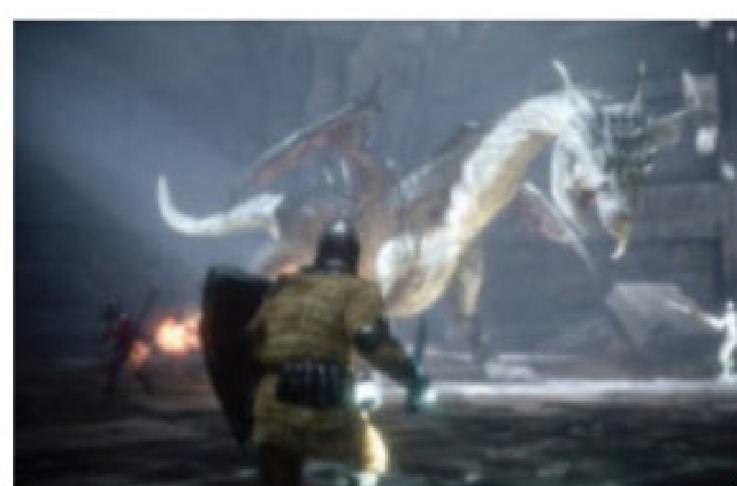
Format: **PS3, PS4**
Publisher: **Square Enix**
Developer: **Omega Force**
ETA: **TBA 2015**



AFTER NEARLY a decade away, the *Dragon Quest* series is returning, with *Dragon Quest Heroes* arriving on PlayStation 4. Although this isn't a straight-up RPG entry in the franchise. This comes from *Dynasty Warriors* developer Omega Force and, in much the same way as *Hyrule Warriors*, will transport the musou brawler template to Square Enix's franchise. It's due on both PS3 and PS4 next year.

DEEP DOWN

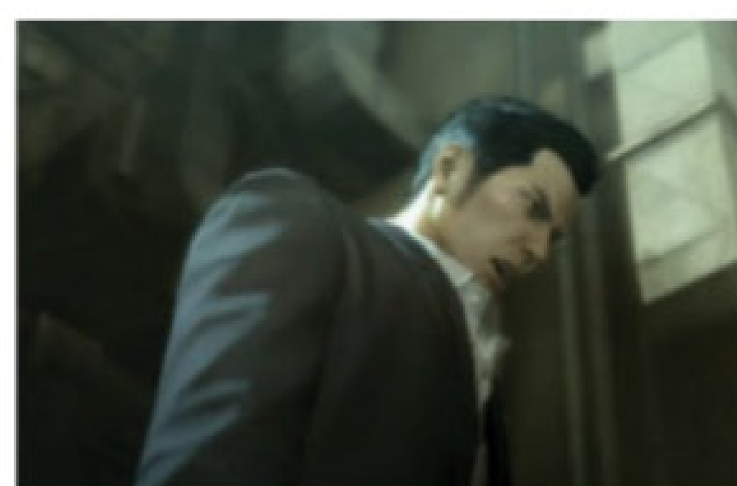
Format: **PlayStation 4**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **TBA 2015**



THINGS HAVE been quiet on Capcom's *Deep Down* for a while now. The *Dark Souls* alike has recently had some gameplay footage break, showing a future New York section. There's also co-operative gameplay that enables up to four players, teaming up with small units of heavily armed fighters to tackle some of the game's larger monsters. There's no release date mentioned outside of a vague 2015.

YAKUZA 0

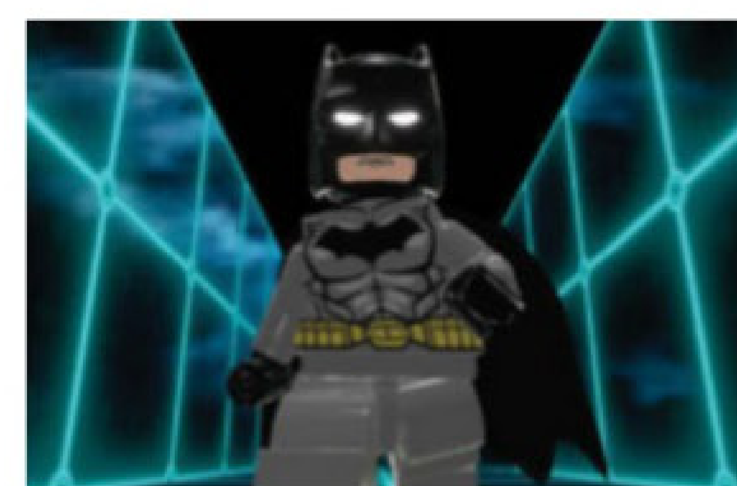
Format: **PS3, PS4**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **TBA 2015**



WE'RE STILL waiting for Sega to release *Yakuza 5* on these shores, but Japanese gamers have a new entry to look forward to. *Yakuza 0* is set in Kamurocho, Tokyo, and Soutenbori, Osaka in 1988. It will serve as a prequel setting up the events of the first game, starring 20-year-old Kazuma Kiryu (a debt collector) and 24-year-old Majima Goro (a club manager). Don't expect to see it in the West for a few years, if ever.

LEGO BATMAN 3: BEYOND GOTHAM

Format: **Multi**
Publisher: **Warner Bros**
Developer: **TT Games**
ETA: **14 November**



THE LATEST entry in the *Batman Lego* series takes the Dark Knight outside Gotham and into space, incorporating more of the DC Universe. However, don't expect the gameplay to go far beyond previous instalments; this is the same wondrous Lego magic, with new ideas and more fan-service than any one geek can handle. Heck, it features Adam West, what more do you want?





ROGUE'S GALLERY

THE SECOND ENTRY IN THE SERIES RELEASED THIS NOVEMBER, ASSASSIN'S CREED ROGUE RECASTS THE PLAYER AS ONE OF THE NEFARIOUS TEMPLARS ON A PATH OF VENGEANCE AGAINST THE BROTHERHOOD. IT'S GOOD TO BE BAD...

At the very inception of the *Assassin's Creed* franchise was the desire to switch perspective and tell the darker side of a hero's journey. When creative director Patrice Désilets finished up his latest temporal-tinged swashbuckler *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*, he pitched a new direction, namely one that would ditch the titular goody-goody Prince in favour of a darker, physically capable protagonist. Inspired by a book he read detailing the travels of Hassan-i Sabbah – a real-life 11th Century Persian missionary who formed a group of Fedayeen assassins in the mountains – Désilets side-lined Persia's future king and focused on a character who skulked in the shadows and delivered swift death to a series of powerful targets. Unafraid to toe the line of moral ambiguity, the assassin would be the antithesis of the sanctimonious Prince: a master tactician, a ghost in the wind, a *killer*.

However, it was too much of a diversion from the *Prince Of Persia* framework and Désilets, alongside his team in Montreal, decided to take the idea and introduce it to a new game world. But by the time the concept had bloomed into what we now know as *Assassin's Creed*, there was a much more straightforward definition of good and evil and the Assassins themselves would represent almost a Jedi-like ancient secret society that spent its time concocting ways to exterminate its dark side archenemies, the Templars.

Accordingly, when it came to *Assassin's Creed: Rogue* – touted to draw to a close the franchise's run on the hardware that it debuted on – Ubisoft has returned to the idea of a ruthless killer not shackled by his conscience by flipping the viewpoint and telling the story of the Templars.

"This is a game about the shades of grey," Ubisoft Sofia's managing director, Ivan Balabanov, tells **games™**. "Our fans have been asking to experience the 'other side' of the story for a very long time now. We decided that the timing is perfect to introduce the Templar point of view."

Assassin's Creed has always been involved in much more than just simple right-and-wrong confrontation – both Orders of Assassins and Templars operate within the realm of profound moral ambiguity. However, previous games have always presented the Assassins as crusaders for righteous justice, often dispatching historical figures that represented some kind of tyrannical regime or (at least with the benefit of revisionist theory) deplorable political belief. In that sense, the villainous side of Templars have, for the most part, been painted with broad strokes. Balabanov explains how *Rogue* will further enhance the complexity of motivations on both sides.

"For us the developers this was obviously a very exciting challenge," he says. "At the end of the day, it is quite infrequent to be given the creative freedom to make a game about the point of view of the 'bad guys' in a major franchise. I believe that our ambition to portray the Templars as a complex and rational organisation, which upholds high ideals and goals, has been quite successful. But the whole experience of seeing the universe of *Assassin's Creed* through the eyes of a Templar will

take players on a very different, very dark journey. This will be an experience in its own right, quite different from any previous *Assassin's Creed* game. It's the darkest one yet in the history of the whole franchise."

Shay is a monster. We've just watched as *Assassin's Creed Rogue*'s protagonist has wandered into a crowd of blissfully unaware townsfolk, only to unleash a senseless poison attack that massacres the entire group. He then shoots a dog.

That's one of the big differences in *Rogue*, that, as a Templar, you're given the freedom to do as much dastardly wrongdoing as you see fit without any game-ending consequences. Indeed, it's the first time that the series has relished in letting the player utilise an assassin's toolset to reckless endeavours and the narrative goes to some lengths to justify the tonal shift. The story follows Shay Patrick Cormack, a young and promising assassin. A little reckless at the start of the game, Shay at some point undergoes a very painful and traumatic experience during a mission he's sent to. This makes him reconsider his loyalty to the Brotherhood, and leads to him taking a different journey than that of his brothers. His path leads him to the Templar order, already a grim, grizzled and determined warrior.

"Rogue takes place after *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* and before *Assassin's Creed III*," confirms Balabanov, confirming *Rogue* as the final entry in the North American trilogy. "At the end of *Black Flag*, we see the ascendance of the Brotherhood in the New World. In *Assassin's Creed III*, Connor has to rebuild the destroyed North American Brotherhood essentially from scratch. *Rogue* will tell the story of what happens in between these two periods."

This means a lot of Assassin slaughtering will take place between 1751 and 1761. "This period coincides with the Seven Years War, known better in North America as the French-Indian War," says Ubisoft Sofia's Balabanov. "Fact of the matter is that this was the first truly global conflict that was fought all over the planet, with Great Britain and France being the main opponents. In *Rogue*, we're focusing specifically on the North Atlantic war theatre, but we hint also at the more global nature of the war, too."

You might not have heard of Ubisoft Sofia before, but the studio has played a major part in previous *Assassin's Creed* games. It developed the PS Vita spin-off *Liberation* and was one of several studios that contributed to last year's *Black Flag*. However, *Assassin's Creed: Rogue* promotes the developer for the first time to lead studio on a major home console entry.

"This has been a really important step forward for us, but at the same time a challenge for which we felt prepared," enthuses Balabanov. "Making this game is both a great experience, and a big challenge, and we've tackled the full development cycle of *Rogue* simply by giving it the best we've got." Although, he acknowledges that, like with all *Assassin's Creed* instalments, Sofia isn't handling the task alone. "Our working relationship with all the great *Rogue* teams from Ubisoft Singapore, Quebec, Bucharest, Milan, Chengdu, Shanghai has been nothing short of fantastic and I am convinced that we all, together, are delivering the game our audience expects."

But given that Ubisoft prefers to treat its studios as a homogenous voice rather than individual creative outlets producing entirely distinctive work, what does Sofia's perspective bring to the series in terms of fresh ideas? "Each Studio has its own identity, culture, and style," Balabanov retorts. "This is a great advantage for us all because it promotes diversity and innovation. While united behind the shared vision of the *Assassin's Creed* brand, we have the opportunity to also leave a unique imprint on the game we're making."

However, Balabanov remains coy as to what those changes are exactly. "They are primarily for you to find out in the game itself," he teases. "They are linked to systemic and emerging



Assassin's Creed: Rogue won't be enjoying the improvements to combat and parkour seen in *Unity* due to the incompatible engine.



ROGUE LEGACY

The returning faces in Assassin's Creed: Rogue

HAYTHAM KENWAY



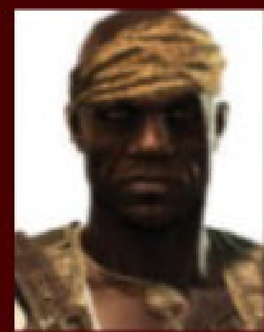
Son of the *Black Flag*'s Edward Kenway and father to Ratonhnhaké:ton, *Assassin's Creed III* enabled players to briefly play as Haytham aboard the ship Providence when he arrives in America. After this time Haytham establishes a permanent organised Templar presence in the colonies, almost wiping out the entirety of Assassins. That's until his adult son emerges and starts ruining everything like kids are wont to do in the course of *Assassin's Creed III*.

ACHILLES DAVENPORT



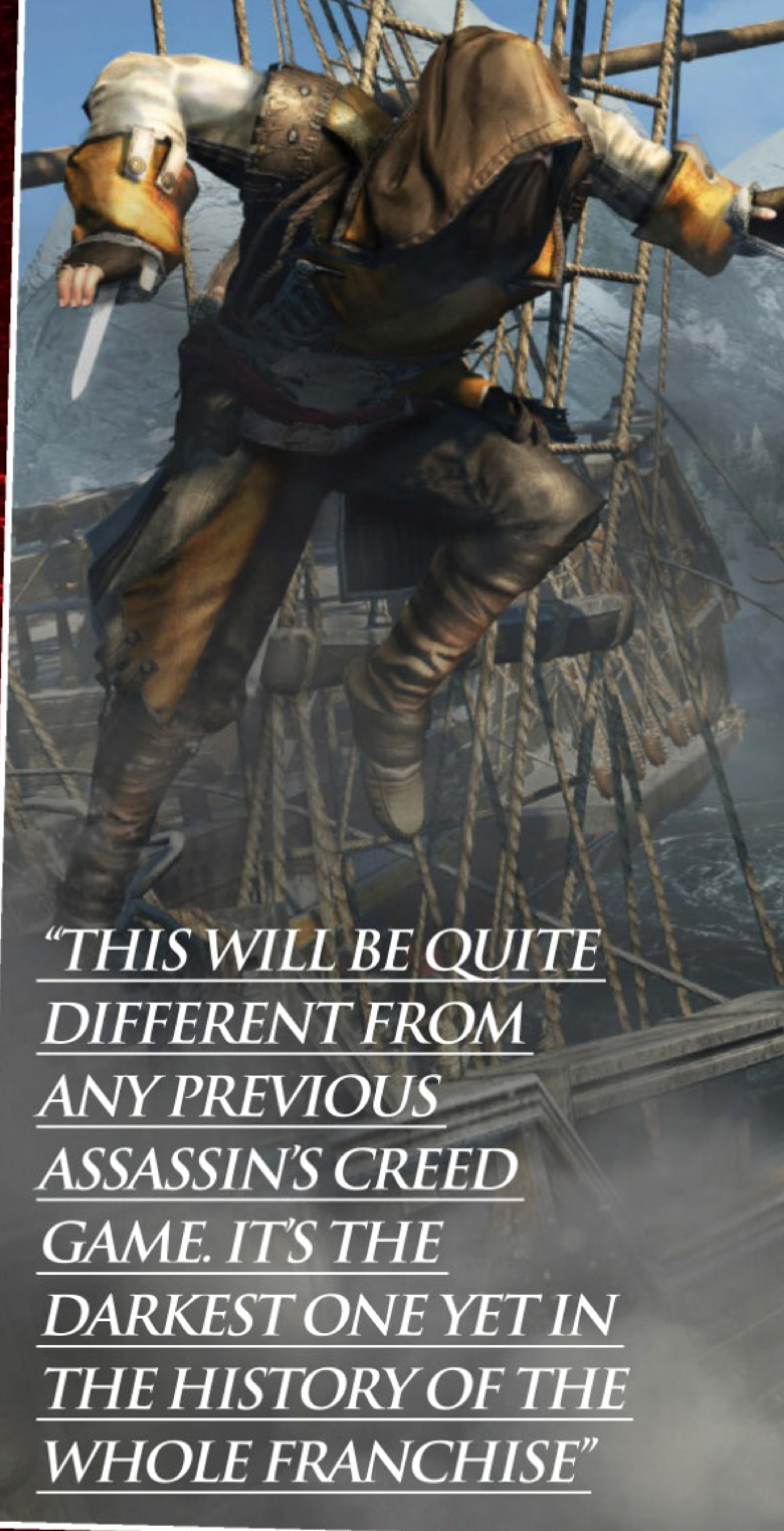
A sort-of Obi Wan figure in the *Assassin's Creed* canon, Achilles was a formative figure in the Colonial Brotherhood of Assassins from 1746 to 1763, before Haytham Kenway and his cronies crippled the order. Living in exile in a rather ostentatious manor, he returns to the Assassin ideology when he meets a young Ratonhnhaké:ton and is convinced to train him in the ways of the Force, er, Assassins.

ADÉWALÉ



Slave-turned-pirate from Trinidad, Adéwalé proved himself a valuable ally to Edward Kenway in *Black Flag*, serving as quartermaster aboard the Jackdaw before eventually assuming the captaincy of his own vessel. He joined the Assassin Order at some point and was integral in the victory of the Maroon rebellion. As one of the toughest Assassins introduced so far, we suspect he'll take on some sort of antagonistic role against *Rogue*'s Shay during the course of the main campaign.





"THIS WILL BE QUITE DIFFERENT FROM ANY PREVIOUS ASSASSIN'S CREED GAME. IT'S THE DARKEST ONE YET IN THE HISTORY OF THE WHOLE FRANCHISE"



Narwhal hunting is an odd diversion in *Assassin's Creed Rogue*. Functioning in the much the same way whaling did in Black Flag, the only real difference is the massive horn on its head that it does its darndest to spike you with.



Ships have had new features added to them, including the ability to break through ice fields and icebergs, leave flaming oil trails and also pepper enemy vessels with machine gun fire.

gameplay, very emotional story, more stealth, very open mission setup, very diverse environments. In many ways I think that Ubisoft Sofia is probably the best choice for the Lead Studio of a game which explores the Templar experience in *Assassin's Creed*."

But what will disappoint some fans is the news that the game doesn't feature the major design overhaul that its PS4 and Xbox One companion release *Unity* debuts on those formats. Indeed, where the fleet-footed assassins in *Unity* have had freerunning, combat and stealth systems completely revamped – built from the ground up to take full advantage of the processing power of the new-gen consoles – *Rogue* further refines the mechanics that were introduced way back in the first game.

"The quantitative leap of the new generation of consoles in terms of CPU and GPU speeds, RAM and VRAM size and speed, etc., and the software of the engine designed to take advantage of them makes it impossible for these changes in the core systems to be transferred or translated to the previous generation," Balabanov explains. "In that sense the decision was taken based on what is feasible and what is not on our target platforms."



But that's not to say that *Rogue* simply coasts on the achievements of its predecessors. Far from it. In fact, during our playthrough we found that the Templar perspective offered something of a more raw combat experience, less limited than the selection of deadly weaponry accessible to assassins. The two most distinctive examples are an air gun and a mortar, both of which fire a variety of ammunition types to cause different effects on the enemy. These include smoke, knock-out and shrapnel bombs, while projectile darts include berserk, which sends targets into a mad frenzy, attacking anyone nearby. The difference between the air gun and the mortar is that the former enables the player to attack from a long range with a greater accuracy, while the latter has a larger impact radius and can hit multiple targets at once. There's plenty of risk/reward to both approaches and it does add a more straightforward aggressive stance to the standard *Assassin's* combat.

Of course, with a more destructive range of weapons at your disposal, collateral damage is an unfortunate consequence. Luckily, given that the Templars are utter bastards, *Rogue* enables you to slaughter innocent civilians without desynchronisation (because, erm, history?). So how does

The biggest mix-up in Templar abilities arrives in the form of firearms. Long-range and explosive attacks are as viable as sneaky stabbing.



the new suite of abilities and weapons represent the new Templar antihero? We put it to the studio's managing director:

"History is our playground," reasons Balabanov. "This is one of our mottos. We take, in every *Assassin's Creed* game, great pains to recreate the world of the respective era as accurately as possible. From this point of view, yes, firearms are present, because this was the actual reality of the mid 18th Century. Shay's arsenal is also enhanced by new ranged weapons – and so is the Morrigan, Shay's ship.

"Nevertheless, we look at these new weapons not as a drawback, but as more opportunities for the players," he continues. "More weapons, with different strengths and weaknesses, means more choice for the player. In the context of a vast open-world game, this is equivalent of providing the player with the means to find and enjoy her or his style – from total offence to complete stealth, from ranged attacks to close combat, and anything in between! The different weapons – be they ranged or close combat ones – are giving the freedom to everybody to have as much fun as possible, their own way."

Balabanov's outline of the mechanics is simple but not without its merits and there are plenty of other small additions that go unmentioned – including the changes to Eagle Vision that shows the direction of the enemy that has spotted you. In truth, much of what we've played indicates a thorough refinement and expansion of what previous existed, focusing on the unique opportunities that its narrative presents.

There are questions to be asked, though: Does *Rogue* tie into *Unity*'s plot? (Answer: It does but not in any way that makes owning both compulsory). What was behind the decision to release two different *Assassin's Creed* games on different console generations within the same year? (Answer: to utilise new technology and still push the limitations of old). And why are there penguins in the arctic? (Answer: they're not penguins but in fact an extinct bird, the great auk). But perhaps an even more suitable question than the geographical habitat of flightless birds is why would Ubisoft choose to return to New York after its much-derided appearance in *Assassin's Creed III*?

"It was essential that we come back to New York in *Rogue*," explains Balabanov. "Our game is the closing chapter of the North American trilogy for that age. In order to maintain the narrative flow and keep consistency with the greater *Assassin's Creed* universe (which includes also all the books, comic books, short movies, etc), Shay needed to go to New York.

"That said, the city of New York in *Rogue* is a quite different one compared to New York from *ACIII* in two major ways," he continues. "First, historically. *Rogue*'s New York is a city 20



GOOD GUYS GONE BAD

There's a little evil in all of us and videogames know it. Here are five franchises that let you play as the bad guy and explore the evil within



MARIO AND LUIGI: BOWSER'S INSIDE STORY

Format: **Nintendo DS**
Year: **2009**



Bowser has been playable in numerous *Mario* spin-off titles over the years, but he didn't get a real starring role until the *Mario & Luigi* DS sequel in 2009 – although the duo are still heavily involved in a weird *Innerspace*-style scenario. While no *evil* is really being committed by the princess pincher, King Koopa instead has to fight to overthrow a new tyrant who rules over the Mushroom Kingdom.



HALF-LIFE: OPPOSING FORCE

Format: **PC** Year: **1999**



Gordon Freeman has really screwed up his first day at Black Mesa, ripping open an inter-dimensional portal that began spitting out aliens. Enter U.S. Marine Adrian Shephard, part of the squad dispatched to cleanse the facility of extra-terrestrial invaders and contain all personnel involved. Unfortunately, that means Freeman is now a target. But when the world is at stake, what's one theoretical physicist compared to the end of all humankind?



BATMAN: ARKHAM ORIGINS

Format: **Multi** Year: **2013**



Let's ignore the fact that the Joker's range of movements is a tad athletic for the wiry villain, the underrated *Arkham Origins* enabled players for a short scene to take control of Batman's nemesis. It wasn't so much an opportunity to cause chaos across the city of Gotham, although Joker does get to take out a room full of thugs using his own brand of brutality – but an opportunity to delve into his psyche. It turns out he's a bit crazy.



METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

Format: **PlayStation 2**
Year: **2004**



Without delving too deep into *Metal Gear*'s convoluted narrative, where the series to date had you playing as Solid Snake, the second PlayStation sequel sent players back in time and stepped into the combat boots of Big Boss (Naked Snake). While to date we've only seen him acting out of nobility and obligation, *The Phantom Pain* promises to show his transformation into the notorious figure first introduced in the series.



CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW 2

Format: **Multi** Year: **2014**



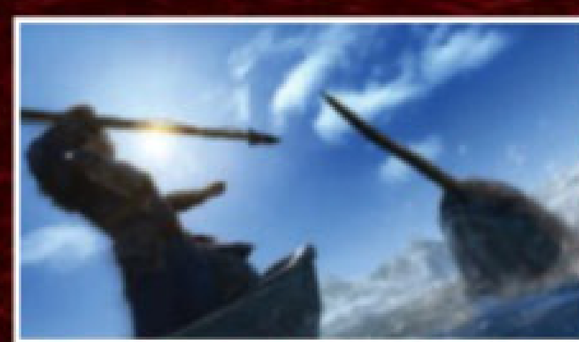
After the double rug-pull of *Lords of Shadow*'s ending, players start the sequel as a modern-day Dracula – albeit one with most of his power drained. After years of hunting down the deadly bloodsucker, finally getting to play as the evil bastard was slightly underwhelming. After centuries causing the Belmont all manner of deadly trouble, who'd have thought that stealthing through a few bushes would be Dracula's downfall.

"ASSASSINS IN ROGUE WILL BE ABLE TO DO TO YOU EVERYTHING YOU WERE DOING IN THE PREVIOUS GAMES: THEY CAN AIR ASSASSINATE YOU, ATTACK YOU FROM A HAYSTACK, STAB YOU FROM THE COVER OF THE CROWD"

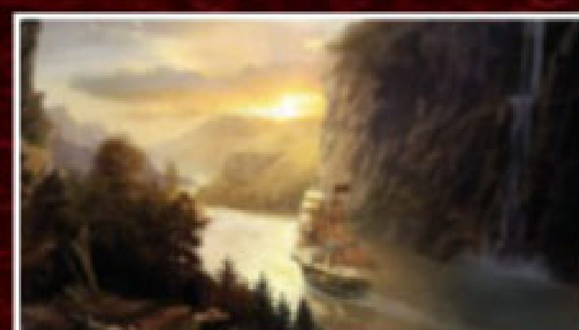
years younger than the one explored by Connor. In *ACIII*, almost a third of the city was burned down in the Great Fire. *Rogue* takes place before the fire – so we have completely reconstructed the burned down part. Second, in terms of gameplay, we have completely overhauled the layout and the rooftops of the city. We have added new navigation elements, which allow the players to cross wide streets and to have fast means of going vertically from ground level to the rooftops, or the other way around. This provides for a very fluid and entertaining navigation across the rooftops of the whole city."

Rogue's New York has also a different population. Besides the civilians that wander around aimlessly and cause a furore when you do something mildly unsociable (like kill someone), and the two main opposing sides in the War – the British and French – Sofia has introduced a new faction: the Gangs – most of which are concentrated in New York. These Gangs work closely with the Assassins: you will probably remember that in the previous games the Assassins tended to work closely with the society's fringe elements: thieves, robbers, courtesans. *Rogue* adheres to this theme, offering a different dynamic to the city.

While *Assassin's Creed III* had a tighter focus on its narrative, and *Black Flag* on exploring a massive open world, *Rogue* will strike a balance between the two. It fills in the gap in the canon that details the fall of the Assassin's Brotherhood, while also opening up the map on a larger scale (we're told the world is



While there's not a massive connection between the two, Ubisoft Sofia has confirmed that there will be a link between Rogue and its new-gen counterpart Unity.



Rogue doesn't appear to have a multiplayer mode, which we're hoping means a more focused single-player campaign.

bigger than *Black Flag*). We're only given a glimpse of this: exploring one region of the arctic in Shay's brig, ploughing through ice fields, fighting other ships (aided by machine gun-like Puckle attached to the ship) and hunting narwhales (as you do); while our adventures on land involve liberating an Assassin base. The result seamlessly blends the full naval experience of *Black Flag* with the series' more traditional land-based gameplay into a satisfying hybrid.

But perhaps the most enticing aspect is the opportunity to embody the ultimate killer; using the skillset of the Assassins for your own Machiavellian schemes and having the opportunity to sow disorder through the world. But there's one problem in being a bad guy: there's always a good guy waiting around the corner to take you down.

"You will be walking in the boots of the Hunter who is after one of the deadliest prey out there," concludes Balabanov. "As a result, the Assassins in *Rogue*, once Shay turns to the Templar, will be able to do to you everything you were doing in the previous games: they can air assassinate you, attack you from a haystack or bush, stab you from the cover of the crowd. On the high seas, the assassin ships can attack and board your ship and kill off your crew. To top it off, all of these behaviours are not put in a setpiece scripted setup: they're fully systemic and unpredictable. Without delving any further, I'd just say: prepare to be surprised!"





THE CREW // DRIVECLUB // PROJECT CARS

The Future of Racing

While this year may be absent of the heavy hitters – Forza, Need For Speed and Gran Turismo – taking their place are some of the most progressive and exciting racing titles to hit the genre in years. From straight-up simulators down to social racing experiences, the likes of The Crew, DriveClub and Project Cars are about to hit the accelerator and speed the racing genre into new horizons. Join **gamesTM** as we tour Evolution Studios, Slightly Mad Studios and Ivory Tower, as they hit the grid for a new type of race

The Crew

Ivory Tower moulds the CaRPG as it takes on America

"I'm sure our accent in Detroit is off or something like that," laughs Julian Gerighty, creative director on *The Crew*, discussing researching the game's four prime cities: Detroit, New York, Miami and Los Angeles. "We don't go to the same fanatical level of detail that Rockstar does for its games, for example. We're not playing that card. But authenticity is important. That means we did send people on road trips out there. The lucky ones got to go to Miami; the unlucky ones got to go to Detroit."

It's here that developer Ivory Tower has on its hands something special. **games™** has experienced bitesize chunks of what promises to be a vast world to explore; driving across the sprawling map of the continental USA refines the open-world driving game beyond the likes of *Need For Speed* and even *Forza Horizon*. The closest comparison is *Test Drive Unlimited*, which enabled players to race luxury sports cars as a wealthy brat across a to-scale recreation of the Hawaiian island of Oahu, which shouldn't come as much of a surprise given that most of the team at its developer, Eden Games, formed Ivory Towers.

And Ivory continues the tradition of *Test Drive Unlimited* by giving the story an irreverent tone – based somewhat on the real underground racing scene that the team researched. "The underground racing scene out [in Detroit] is still huge," enthuses Gerighty. "All of these kids are passionate about cars, lots of Japanese cars, a few European for the guys that still have a lot of money. They street race all the time. That helped form the tone of *The Crew*." It also helped the team nail down some of the gameplay specifics. In the past Gerighty has made comparisons to the MMO and RPG genre and it's clear how both genres have influenced the game, shucking the traditional template of grinding for cash to buy new cars and upgrades. Here, cars are treated much like characters in an RPG. Each has its own level and can be specialised like RPG classes – stock, street, racing, dirt racing, circuit racing, high performance and raid (a hardened off-road spec) – focusing the player on improving and upgrading a couple of vehicles rather than owning a vast garage. And, in another parallel, new parts are gained from the world rather than buying them from a shop – offered as reward for completing objectives and races.

The latter point ties into the way the world was built, with new challenges and events procedurally generated around the map. "I think the key here is emergence and how it provides surprising gameplay," says Gerighty. "An open, shared-world game with lots of players in it with that emergent content you get so many hours of entertainment from that compared to linearity. From the point of view as a developer, where do we want to spend our money? Our concept, which is world generation, is super important to put in. But this is the world we wanted to build, trying to offer something different that was already out there. This is where the genre is heading. The super-linear are going to die more and more."



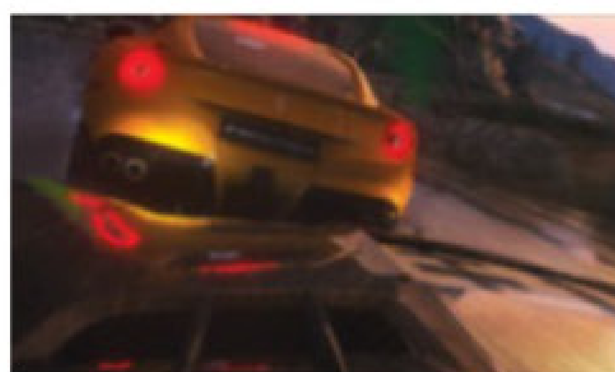
■ The four cities of *The Crew* make for diverse terrain.

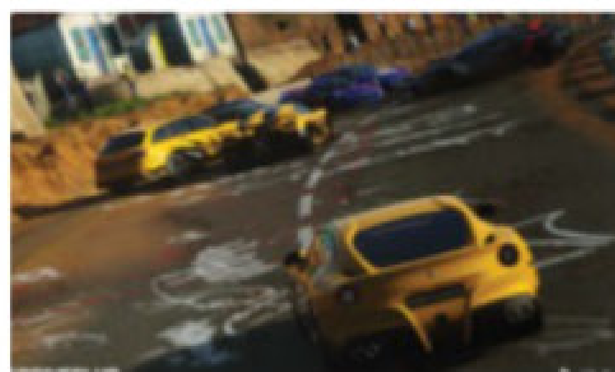
Inside Evolution Studios

On the eve of DriveClub's long-awaited release, gamesTM journeys to Evolution Studios for a look inside Sony's secret weapon

If you were asked to drop a pin into a map to locate the epicentre of Sony's pioneering work on PlayStation 4, Runcorn doesn't immediately spring to mind. But that's precisely where games™ finds itself today, sitting in the home of Evolution Studios as the team crunches in preparation for the release of its debut PlayStation 4 title, *DriveClub*. While Japan may have built the console, and its American studios iterated on the company's franchise stalwarts, Sony has its hopes pinned to the Cheshire-based studio to deliver on the nascent promise of its new system a year after its launch. Interesting, considering that *DriveClub* was originally set to release alongside the PS4 and was subsequently delayed 12 months.

"The extra time has benefited the game in so many ways," reasons *DriveClub*'s director, Paul 'Rushy' Rustchynsky. "We've done a lot in that time. The visuals have been enriched, we've added more cars and more tracks, rewrote our particle system and improved our anti-aliasing solutions."







> "We totally changed the single-player campaign mode. We took it upon ourselves to redo it from scratch"
>
> Paul 'Rushy' Rustchynsky, Director, DriveClub

This is a game that not only looks like the logical next step in gaming, but also *feels* like it. Demonstrating more of the improvements in-game, Rushy whips a Mercedes SLS around a rain-dashed track in Scotland. The gameplay refinements are substantial, specifically when it comes to the accuracy of vehicle physics and handling, ensuring that each car demonstrates its inherent personality. Yet, despite such depth to its simulation, there's an understated accessibility that, as Rushy explains, has been mostly absent from the genre: "One of the most difficult things to achieve was that balance," he says. "It's something that I don't think a lot of racing games have managed to achieve for quite a while. We've done it by trying to simulate everything accurately first. We have an extremely detailed simulation model sitting underneath everything but what we do is have a number of layers that sit on top of that, which introduce those accessible elements.

"For example, we've spent a huge amount of time on the analogue stick input and trying to make sure that we give that player the input into the game that they want," he continues. "Part of it is predicting what the car is going to do in the next few seconds depending on what the player is inputting at that time, and it's kind of this really fine balance. We know that analogue steering can't give you the same experience as a steering wheel, so we have to do some of the work for the player. But we don't want to feel that it strips anything back either. The moment you start to do that you lose that depth »



DriveClub by Numbers

19,000
pink flamingos populate the Indian track Chungara Lake, each behaving independently of each other

500
material types used by the designers to create the vehicles

100
different varieties of trees, bushes, mosses, and flowers can be found throughout the game

2,500
stars (roughly) can be seen in the sky above, with NASA data used to accurately map out the night sky wherever you are in the world

1,000+
photos taken of the interior and exterior of every car during reference gathering

260,000
polgyons make up a typical car in DriveClub

200km
was the minimal distance covered each day by the team out on location researching each track. Also 200km is the draw distance of each location to the horizon and even simulates the curvature of the Earth

1.2 million
road-side trees can be found on some of the tracks



» and subtlety and you need that for the long-term engagement. You want those expert players to be playing it for months and months shaving off milliseconds off those lap times." It's this idea of fastidious attention to detail without compromising the player experience that is shared amongst the entire team. We ask whether the game will feature customisation options for vehicles and handling. We're told it doesn't, simply because it didn't fit in with the studio's approach to its new racer.

"Because *DriveClub* is such a social game you can't put barriers of entry to players," says design director Simon Barlow. "You can't start segregating your community with games such as this. Even though there is a very healthy single-player component of the game, the vast majority of the game is meant to be enjoyed either synchronously or asynchronously with other players. As soon as you start introducing upgrade paths or detailed vehicle customisation you start dividing up that community. That was a very conscious decision. We wanted to make sure that people felt engaged and didn't feel intimidated by the *DriveClub* experience."

While MotorStorm has left an indelible mark on the studio and its work on *DriveClub*, we're surprised to find that the series entry that had the greatest impact on the Evolution's PS4 racer is its PS Vita spin-off, *MotorStorm RC*. The studio's underrated top-down *Micro Machines*-alike, aside from genre fundamentals the two may as well be chalk and cheese. However, Barlow reasons that it shaped many of the social features that would constitute the foundations of the *DriveClub* experience. "It seems like we almost prototyped a lot of this stuff in *MotorStorm RC*," he laughs. "A lot of the challenge-based gameplay we pioneered with *MotorStorm RC*. Racing games generally can be quite lonely experiences and you've got to aim for first place, and if you're not first you become frustrated. In *MotorStorm: Apocalypse* we added the wagering system to give you a different objective. Face Offs in *DriveClub* are a kind of refinement of that system – a way of giving you something else to achieve."

These Face Offs are dynamic objectives that are brought into the race. They can range from beating an average speed in a particular zone on a track, or best a friend's drift score around a certain corner. What's more, they're regularly updated based on your friends, your club – the titular clubs of up to six players where you complete challenges together to earn fame and contribute to the club's overall success – and the *DriveClub* community. Every time you play a race, there will be a different set of challenges waiting for you to tackle, meaning that you'll have plenty of reasons to revisit tracks multiple times. This ties into Fame (the game's currency) with each objective offering Fame points that'll contribute towards your driver level and club level, enabling you to unlock more cars and rewards.

All this interlocks with the social side of the game, which Evolution describes as a "real-time social network" the purpose of which was to constantly keep players updated with their friends' and clubmates' activity, stimulating a competitive community always challenging each other. The difference with a traditional menu interface is that *DriveClub* subverts the traditional pull content of gaming – where users are presented with a menu to pick a mode in a linear fashion. Instead, the menu itself adapts and suggests things based on your user preference. Making a social network that had the clarity and necessary user-friendly interface was one of the major stumbling blocks when it came to hitting its original launch in 2013. "We've said this a few times over the past few months but I'm not sure how widely known it is," says Barlow. "Underneath *DriveClub* is a social network and it was constructed in isolation to the game. We built the game client and the server architecture and in between the two is this social layer. The interaction between those three components is extremely complex. At the time we didn't realise how demanding it would be, given the complex interactions with the game client. What that means is as you're playing the game, your progress is being recorded, everything is being tracked behind the scenes and the game will generate activity for you based on things that you do, things that you take part in. The activities can be shared with your friends and club mates, they can then join in that activity."

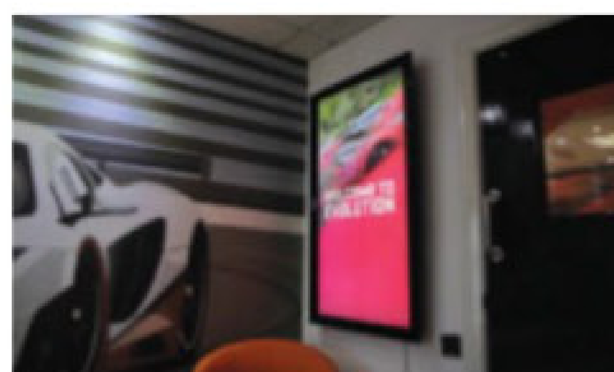
We're shown a quick example, where a challenge we're not a part of appears on our activity feed and we're able to join our friend and forward the challenge to our own friends, even if the host isn't friends with them. "We try and make sure that the game universe is as vibrant and dynamic as it possibly could," continues Barlow. "Getting that to interact well and getting players to experience is seamlessly was the thing that really took the time. I think we had 27 iterations of the menu. It was just a constant refinement and we worked through so many rounds of user testing. We think we've nailed it."

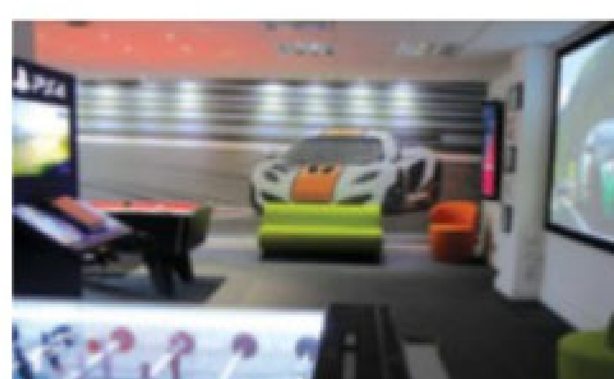
That enthusiasm is certainly shared with other members of Evolution. The *DriveClub* that is being released this year really is the game the studio always intended on making.

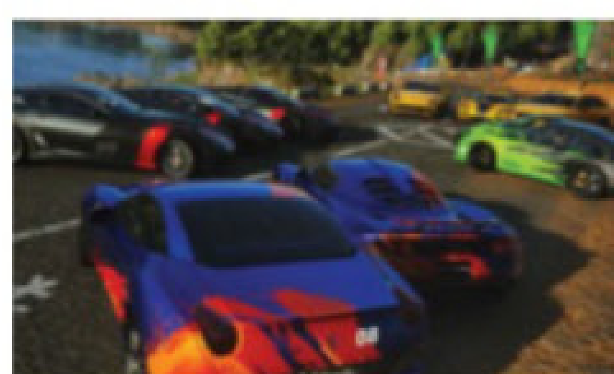


■ Social interaction is the crux of the *DriveClub* experience.

> "LAST YEAR IT STILL WOULD'VE BEEN A VERY GOOD RACING GAME BUT NOW I THINK WE'VE GOT A TRULY FANTASTIC ONE"
> PAUL 'RUSHY' RUSTCHYNSKY, DIRECTOR, DRIVECLUB







■ Evolution's Cheshire HQ neighbours Sony's R&D department working on Project Morpheus.

Barlow details some of the original design mock-ups for the dynamic menu that date back over two years and the final result bears startling similarities.

But the biggest change from the game it would've been had it released in 2013 is one that the studio has yet to discuss openly (despite being heavily rumoured). "We totally changed the single-player campaign mode," reveals Rushy. "Initially we had it as a more freeform pick your own race and we didn't feel it had the motivations of lesser objectives to drive players through. So in January we took it upon ourselves to redo it from scratch and put together a new semi-linear tour-based mode that allows players to compete in a series of events that perhaps have specific objectives like 'compete a specific Face Off' or 'obtain a certain number of fame points inside a race' and we felt that was much more compelling for users to play through."

This way everyone gets to experience everything that *DriveClub* has to offer, from driving Norway's curved Alpine roadways under the aurora borealis, to hammering a lap in an Aston Martin V12 Vantage S across Chile's dusty countryside, there's a breath-taking amount of depth and detail to discover. And this is just the beginning. Rushy and Barlow discuss the advanced engine that underpins *DriveClub*, developed from a holistic perspective enabling the best results for whatever the job at hand is (they cite five different anti-aliasing solutions and multiple different rendering systems).

"What we are doing with this console right now, there are very few developers worldwide who are doing this on any platform," enthuses Barlow. "We've always had a reputation as a heavyweight tech company, even within Sony. *MotorStorm: Apocalypse* was pushing things on PlayStation 3 that even after that game launched no one else was really doing on that console. But that took us two or three titles to get there. Now, I've seen the art director's request list for the engine after *DriveClub* and it's pretty long. That's not a bad thing. He's already pushed for quite a lot in this game and he has so much more. You can't buy that sort of level of dedication and that builds a game like *DriveClub*."

"Obviously we're going to be biased," adds Rushy. "But just looking at the game either in screenshots or in motion, even on your own TV, it looks incredible. It's unlike anything else out there. Last year it still would've been a very good racing game, but now I think we've got a truly fantastic one."

DriveClub Avoids VR (For Now)

Evolution explains why it isn't adopting Project Morpheus…yet

"We've not hidden the fact that the internal technology site is on the same site as we are at Evolution," says Simon Barlow, design director at Evolution Studios. "It's an independent group in another part of the building locked away. Speaking personally from a designer's perspective I'm very excited about what Morpheus can bring. It's something that I've had my hands on and it's a very impressive piece of hardware and I like the experiences people are producing for it. I'd like to do something with it. Whether *DriveClub* is necessarily a good fit or not or any racing game is debatable. We're taking baby steps with VR right now –the whole industry is – and we're trying to work out what works and what doesn't work with VR. We're still learning the lessons, I think."



■ Evolution designs a new IP for each new Sony console.

Project Cars

The new kid on the block, games™ gets an extensive hands on with Slightly Mad Studios' Gran Turismo and Forza beater

On a balmy August morning in Kent, games™ is squeezing (and we mean *squeezing*) into what looks like a Formula 1 car for toddlers, dropping our visor and delicately priming the gearstick before we switch the ignition and hear the engine roar into deafening life. This is a little more hands-on than a typical game preview. For one, we are actually sitting in a physical car on the famous Brands Hatch race track. But before our tyres gently roll onto the starting line where we wait for the green light before slamming the accelerator, we're given strict instructions to follow the signposts that detail when to break, accelerate and turn on the course to maximise our lap time.

We do exactly that, successfully avoiding any calamitous exchanges with tyre stacks and crash barriers. But more than just an opportunity to sit a hair's length above the ground while hurtling down a track at 60mph, we're taking part in reference gathering, studying each corner, incline and straight as we take several tours in the lithe racing car. When we find ourselves back on the track a couple of hours later preparing to do it all again, we're inside *Project Cars* – Slightly Mad Studios' crowd-funded racer – and the scenario has been replicated with literal laser-scanned precision – even down to the weather (connecting online replicates the real-world weather of any given location). With various customisable options to make the accuracy acute









(including steering wheel, helmet cam and Oculus Rift), the proof is in the lap times that remarkably reproduce our real times with minimal leeway. It's clear that *Project Cars* is all about creating the racing experience as accurately as possible.

This situates *Project Cars* ahead of its rivals on the starting grid. Where *The Crew* tours America, *Forza Horizon 2* delivers the casual racing thrills in lieu of a *Need For Speed* this year and Sony's own *DriveClub* hones in on the social experience, Slightly Mad's racer is a simulator poised to rival the absent first-party properties *Gran Turismo* and *Forza*. More than that, though, with the luxury of evolving outside of the publisher system, the game was built to satisfy its community. "We're all racing fans; we've been making racing games for many years, and god forbid the next racing game comes out and I have to start in a really slow car, grind for cash to upgrade it to be even fun and grind even further to the car I actually want," says creative director Andy Tudor, who previously worked on the *Shift* series. "I'm done with that. Time is precious, we all have busy lives and I think gamers have become more mature as well, growing up playing those games and they're looking for something a bit more fresh."

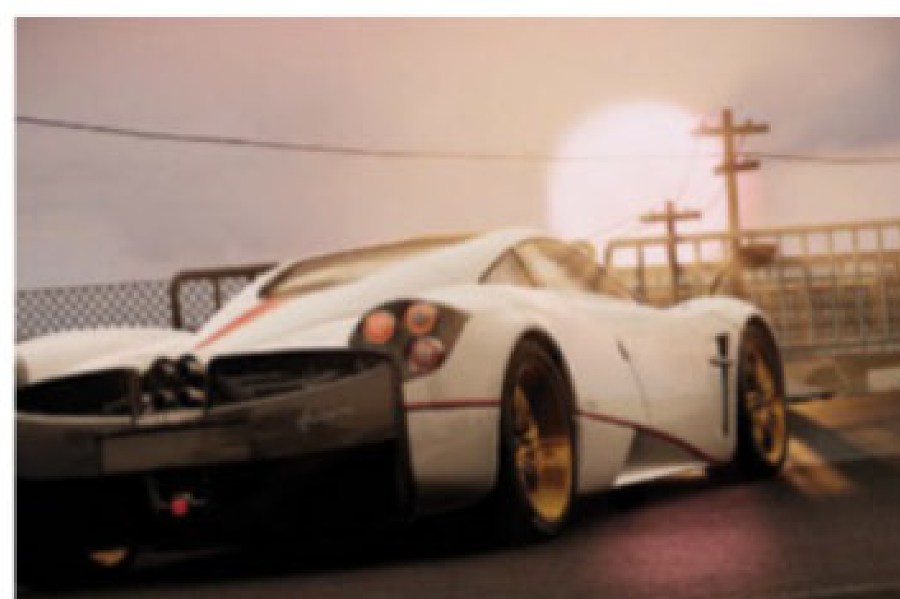
The way *Project Cars* approaches this, as Tudor sees it, antiquated system of preventing players from doing the things they want, is to put the focus back on the driving. This way you can jump straight into Brands Hatch in the car *you* want

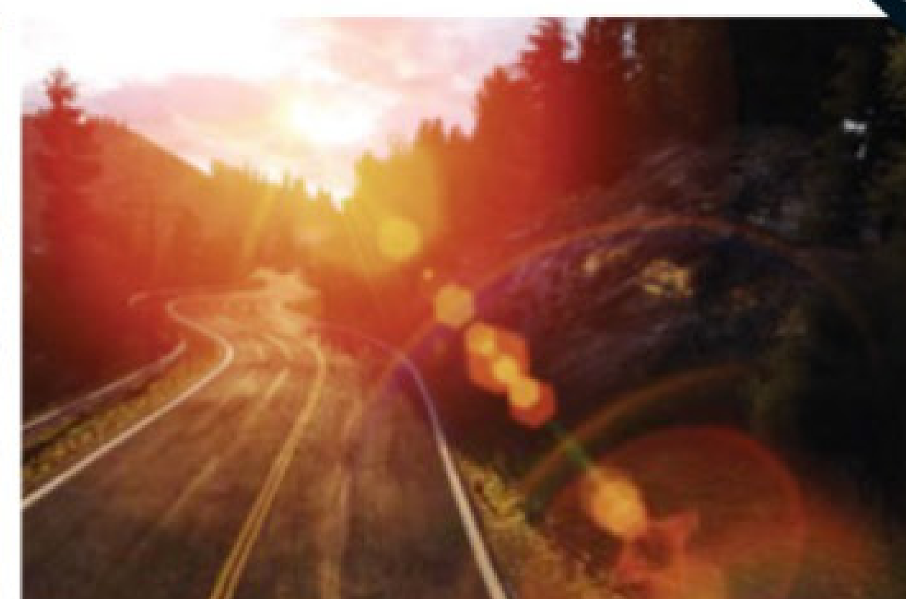


and immediately construct a personalised type of experience. "You might want to jump into a kart and have an awesome experience going around a little karting track," enthuses Tudor. "Or jump into a Le Mans prototype and have an endurance race from the afternoon into the night and to the dawn – and see the correct moon and sun and constellations in the sky above you. Or you could jump into a F1 car and do a race that might be on that particular weekend and set the weather so it starts raining halfway through. These are things that you can't do in other games to this level of fidelity."

But there's also a huge amount of variety in the gameplay. Historical Goals is the main single-player campaign option, while Defending Champ emulates *FIFA*'s 'Be A Pro' mode and then Triple Crown that gives players a taste of all the nine motorsport disciplines. There's an abundance of diversity available, featuring a vast garage that makes for wildly differing player experiences from race-to-race, *Project Cars* continues to surprise after hours. But if there's any testament to the power of its simulation, it's in the professional endorsements: German GT driver Rene Rast has been using the game in preparation for his big endurance races this year, by using his own rig to tackle Le Mans and Nürburgring. If *Project Cars* can rally as much enthusiasm from gamers as it does professional racers, then Slightly Mad's ambitious racer has all the hallmarks of an underdog primed for glory.













Andy Tudor

Project Cars' creative director discusses Driver Network, MMOs and the ultimate way to play the game

How are you approaching post-launch support? In the past you've described it as an MMO experience…
We've been making the game with the community since day one. It's our own IP and our own franchise. We plan on being around for a very long time. We want to support the community long after the game comes out – the Driver Network is part of that, but there will be other things too. We have the community giving feedback throughout development, up until release. That same community tell you 'Now I want this in there' and then when you put this feature in the game, you talk to them about how you can potentially expand it.

And when you think about that concept that's exactly the same as how MMOs operate and that is very much a next-generation way of treating your game and players. This is our own IP, our own franchise and we've made it in our own way we want to do something more ground-breaking.

How does Driver Network differ from AutoLog
When we did *Shift 2* we kind of came up with the idea that it'd be nice if players could compete with each other. Then we looked at what Criterion were doing and they looked back at us and we realised 'God, we're doing the same thing aren't we?'. *Project Cars* enhances upon the things that we've learnt on those previous games. How we've found players to compete and share. Also taken advantage of the new technology, new console hardware and stuff like that. You can connect with your friends, compare your driver profiles with each other, see who's best, and find areas you might want to improve upon. We always say that *Project Cars* is the ultimate driver journey. What that means is that when you compare the stats and all the other things it tells a different story there of what you love doing, what you're good at.

> "These are things that you can't do in other games to this level of fidelity"
> Andy Tudor, Creative Director, Slightly Mad Studios

Is it heading to Wii U?
On Wii U there's no conspiracy. We announced we were doing a Wii U version early on, we had a passionate number of people contact us when we delayed it. There's no conspiracy theory here. Nintendo fans love the game and they're crying out for something like this. We're not going to disappoint them by rushing it for November; they expect more and deserve more.

What is the ultimate *Project Cars* experience on which platform?
It depends on who you speak to on the development team. I'm an Xbox ambassador so the Xbox One is my preferred console. I'm going to play it on Xbox One, sat on the couch while the kids are out the house and playing something in the touring or GT categories and not necessarily using the most pro handling models.



THE PETROLHEAD MAESTRO BEHIND THE GRAN TURISMO SERIES HAS DEDICATED HIS CAREER TO REPLICATING THE FINER DETAILS OF HIS PASSION. NOW REVVING UP FOR THE SERIES' DEBUT ON PLAYSTATION 4, **KAZUNORI YAMAUCHI** TALKS TO **GAMES™** ABOUT A LIFE IN THE FAST LANE

S P E E D



80 BLANCPAIN
NISSAN
nismo
ACADEMY
PlayStation
BLANCPAIN
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GT3
MOTUL
NISSAN
nismo
YouTube
nismo.TV
PIRELLI
MOTUL

RACER



Gran Turismo might not be the looker it once was, but it represented something much more important than dizzying visuals. Originally released on PSone in 1997, the instant gratification of arcade-style racers, such as *Ridge Racer* and *Daytona USA*, would be replaced by what Sony would affectionately dub 'The Real Driving Simulator'.

All of a sudden players had vast virtual garages adorned by a spectacular array of exotic sports cars, motorsport vehicles and the odd hatchback. Gamers achieved ownership over their fascination with auto sports, fortified by a meaningful sense of progression that would usher in a new age of racing game. The genre was all but revitalised by one man: series creator Kazunori Yamauchi.

"When I was between the ages of 10 and 15, I really had a technical curiosity for how cars worked. I really wanted to find out how they did what they did," says Yamauchi, CEO of Sony's in-house development company Polyphony Digital. "The other part of it was that I really wanted to drive well – and I thought to myself that if there was a driving simulator, that would help me to do that."

To Yamauchi, 47, *Gran Turismo* represents the realisation of a dream: a driving game which operated within the real-world rules of physics, with each car painstakingly recreated so the player could experience how they behaved in real life. Fully licensed, it included a huge 173 variations of cars, from everyday vehicles such as the Honda Civic to Aston Martins and Dodge Vipers – and introduced millions of kids to modifiable Japanese performance cars such as the Mitsubishi GTO and Toyota Supra. "Learning to drive cars is sometimes risky and I thought that if I had a driving simulator, I could drive whatever car I wanted," Yamauchi continues. "That people would use my game to choose the cars they bought never occurred to me. I think within the limits of the PSone hardware, we did fairly well with *Gran Turismo*. There were a lot of restrictions within that hardware."

Yamauchi has more than a respect for motor vehicles: when he speaks of them it is with wonder, one born of a fascination with engineering. Granting players the opportunity to tune performance via tweaks to almost any part of the cars in *GT* reflected that. It tapped into their inner boy racer, with cash earned in races splashed to boost BHP and customise the look of their favourite mean machines.

Then there were the graphics. Dive into replay mode and its feeling was that of a spectator watching a real-life televised race occurring right in front of you. Of course, this didn't happen by chance. Yamauchi studied film techniques to better sell the game's authenticity. "*Gran Turismo* consists of lots of different factors, which reflect my interests," he says. "I like to travel, so I incorporated a lot of that. I have filmed movies since my second year of junior high school, like 14 years old, so it's from there that the photo part, the replays, was introduced into the game. It was sort of my hobby! Collecting my hobbies and putting them all together."

Working at Sony Music Japan at a time when the company was considering entering the lucrative console market, his department began to develop games for industry heavyweights Sega and Nintendo – albeit on a small scale. When he presented the work he had already done on his 'simulator' to executives, they weren't convinced and instead set him developing a *Mario Kart* clone, *Motor Toon Grand Prix*.

Not to be deterred, he continued to outline a project that would prioritise real-life car dynamics over arcade thrills. Two years later a sequel (which did receive a worldwide release) known outside Japan as just *Motor Toon Grand Prix* was released, and is considered a test version of *GT*. "I'm not the kind of person who sets objectives and starts



With each new generation of PlayStation console, Yamauchi has been at the cutting edge of graphics and performance.





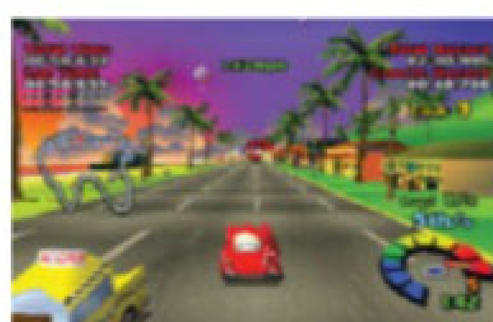
HISTORY OF YAMAUCHI

1994



MOTOR TOON GRAND PRIX
PSone

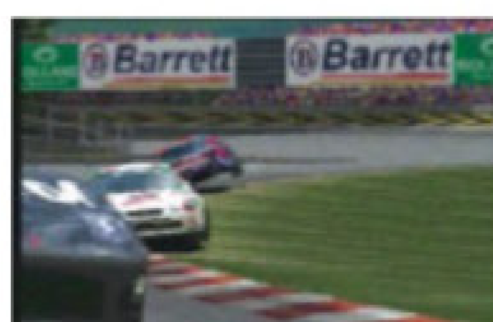
For Kazunori Yamauchi's debut as a director, Sony set the young designer the task of creating a *Mario Kart* clone. However, Yamauchi had already begun to lay the foundation for what would eventually become *Gran Turismo*, integrating realistic physics into the game's casual framework. The game wasn't a huge success but its impact and influence on Yamauchi's career would become invaluable to the industry.



1997

GRAN TURISMO
PSone

Taking five years to make, *Gran Turismo* became one of the most important titles in Sony's dominance over the console marketplace in the late Nineties and early 2000s. It would radically shake up the racing genre, integrating a suite of authentic features and prioritising realism over arcade thrills. It not only became one of PlayStation's most profitable franchises, but its would prove to be one of the most important and groundbreaking games of all time.



"THE HIGH QUALITY OF DATA THAT WE HAVE BEING RENDERED ON THE PS4 IS GOING TO MAKE AN INCREDIBLE DIFFERENCE"
Kazunori Yamauchi, Polyphony Digital

moving towards them – I always want to do the best for that particular moment," he shrugs. "I did that because there was no other way to go about it at the time."



Sony was impressed – and Yamauchi accepted its suggestion of forming a company, Polyphony Digital, to continue work with his own team on a dedicated simulator. It took a further year of intense work to complete *Gran Turismo* – in all, Yamauchi says his team of seven worked on the game for five years – and it went on to become the bestselling game on the original PlayStation with almost 11 million copies shipped. There have been six primary games in the franchise to date, with the last of them, *GT6*, arriving in December last year. Two prologues, which served to whet the appetite of the public ahead of the release of *GT4* and *GT5*, and a PSP version are notable among the secondary releases. "Every title was very difficult to create, there's no mistaking that. Some of them have things that I consider mistakes," admits Yamauchi. "There are a lot of things I would have done differently if I could do them again. Better physics, sound, AI, graphics… I'd like to do everything all over again!"

David Wilson, head of PR at Sony Computer Entertainment UK since before the launch of the PlayStation 2, was unsurprised by Yamauchi's desire to remake the series. "He's a perfectionist… I'm sure he does! But there's always a development period for games," he told **games™**. "You have to try to meet the release date."

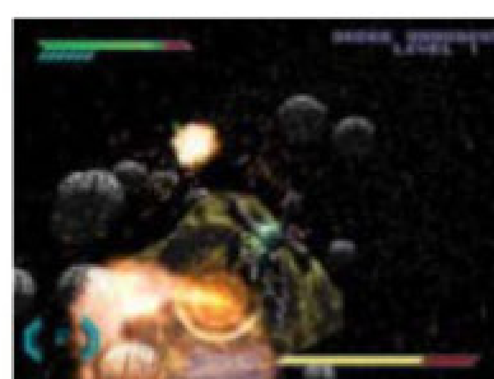
Wilson acknowledged that the PlayStation-exclusive series has been key to the success of Sony's consoles, effectively showcasing the power of each piece of hardware. The PSone sequel sold more than nine million units, while the PS2 iterations – 2001's *GT3: A-Spec* and *GT4* (2005) – shifted almost 15 million and 12 million respectively. The arrival of the PlayStation 3 allowed Yamauchi to include more than a thousand car models in both *GT5* (2010) and *GT6*, with damage and weather changes featuring for the first time. Last year's outing even boasted real-life constellations in the night sky – and allowed players to drive a Lunar Rover on the moon. The attention to detail is astonishing, with thousands of photos used to recreate each circuit and the surface laser scanned to mimic every contour and crack. Yamauchi has estimated that his tracks are accurate to the nearest centimetre. Only 2.3 million copies of *GT6* were sold thanks to the earlier arrival of the PlayStation 4, but there were 11 million sales for the former game and more than 5 million for the 2008 *GT5 Prologue* release.

Despite the succulent visuals and authentic gameplay experience, which has become synonymous with the brand, Yamauchi revealed that he has always been forced to cut corners – even on the last-gen hardware. "A lot of different things were cut: resolution, graphic designs, everything »

1999

OMEGA BOOST
PSone

✪ Polyphony Digital's only departure from the racing genre, *Omega Boost* was produced by Yamauchi and was developed by several former members of Team Andromeda – the studio behind Sega's *Panzer Dragoon* series. While it only received a lukewarm reception on release, the shoot-'em-up's fast-paced action and dizzying visuals were let down by repetitive design and short campaign. With a bit more design ambition, *Omega Boost* could've been a classic.





2016." It is strongly rumoured that motorbikes could be included, with Polyphony reportedly having sent a team to scout the legendary mammoth 61km Isle of Man TT course.

"Nothing can be said at this moment, but I myself have never denied the possibility of motorcycles making an appearance in one of my games," Yamauchi smiles mischievously. "When I raced in the 24 Hours of Nürburgring, I was there a week before and driving a GT-R loaned to me by Nissan. As I was driving on the track there were all these motorcycles riding along with me and it seems to me something special. It's something I don't deny."

He acknowledges, however, that it is difficult to predict what may be included in this game, never mind further editions. "Twenty years ago it was fairly easy to imagine what was coming in the following five years, but now it's very difficult to think about what's going to happen in the next six months."

Yamauchi is a busy man. Alongside his endurance racing career, manufacturers are falling over themselves to have custom-designed sports models included in his games. Some of these even become real cars – such as the Nissan Concept 2020 Vision *Gran Turismo* recently unveiled at Goodwood. "In the beginning, of course, I didn't imagine these things would happen," he says. "Going beyond boundaries is something I enjoy doing. I don't want to limit myself to this profession, or that profession. Whenever I meet new people from different worlds, I think to myself: 'I'll try some of that.' I think racing is part of that. I'm very opportunistic." He is speaking to **games™** at the Gran Turismo Academy, a competition which seeks to convert the world's greatest *GT* players into real-life racing drivers. Several winners of the annual European competition are already successful drivers, with 2011 champion Jann Mardenborough notching a GP3 victory recently at Hockenheim – "I applied to university to study interior design but I had to ring up and say 'Sorry – I'm not coming to uni because I'm going to be a racing driver instead!'" says the Brit, tipped by many as a future Formula One driver. "I'm proud that they are now racing drivers thanks in part to my game – proud, and worried at the same time!" chuckles Yamauchi. "Driving with the GT Academy drivers is a happy and privileged experience for me – they've been selected out of millions of participants in the programme and are very intelligent, interesting people."

As proof of the enduring quality of his games, Kazunori Yamauchi could not ask for a better legacy.



"FOR GT7, MYSELF AND MY STAFF HAVE A CLEAR VISION: TO DO EVERYTHING WE COULDN'T DO IN GT6"

Kazunori Yamauchi, Polyphony Digital

throughout the gameplay," he says. "The level of the data that's being handled, whether it be the environment data or the car data, they're on a fantastically high level – but the PS3 isn't able to process it very well. Honestly speaking, the PS3 was really, really hard to develop on. There was just not enough memory in the hardware. We always had to fight with the amount of memory that we had available." However, he is not finished with it just yet: "We're going to make *GT6* still a little bit better than it is now – there are a few more major updates coming for the game."



Unsurprisingly, Polyphony's team of hundreds are hard at work on *GT7*, the first planned *Gran Turismo* for the PS4. Yamauchi has said that the system's advantages means it should be able to get the game out more quickly this time around, with a potential release date of late 2015. "On the PS4, the memory capacity is much larger. In that environment, we can run *Gran Turismo* in the form that it was meant to run," he reveals. "Everything will be running naturally. PS3 was much, much more difficult. The high quality of data that we have being rendered on the PS4 I think is going to make an incredible difference."

We ask how many cars and tracks he expects to be included – "Many more, I believe. Of course it's not going to be double or anything like that!" – before fishing for hints about new features. "For *GT7*, myself and my staff have a clear vision: to do everything we couldn't do in *GT6*. We want to make it very *Gran Turismo*. By that I mean it's going to be a game that matches the very era that we live in, in 2015 or

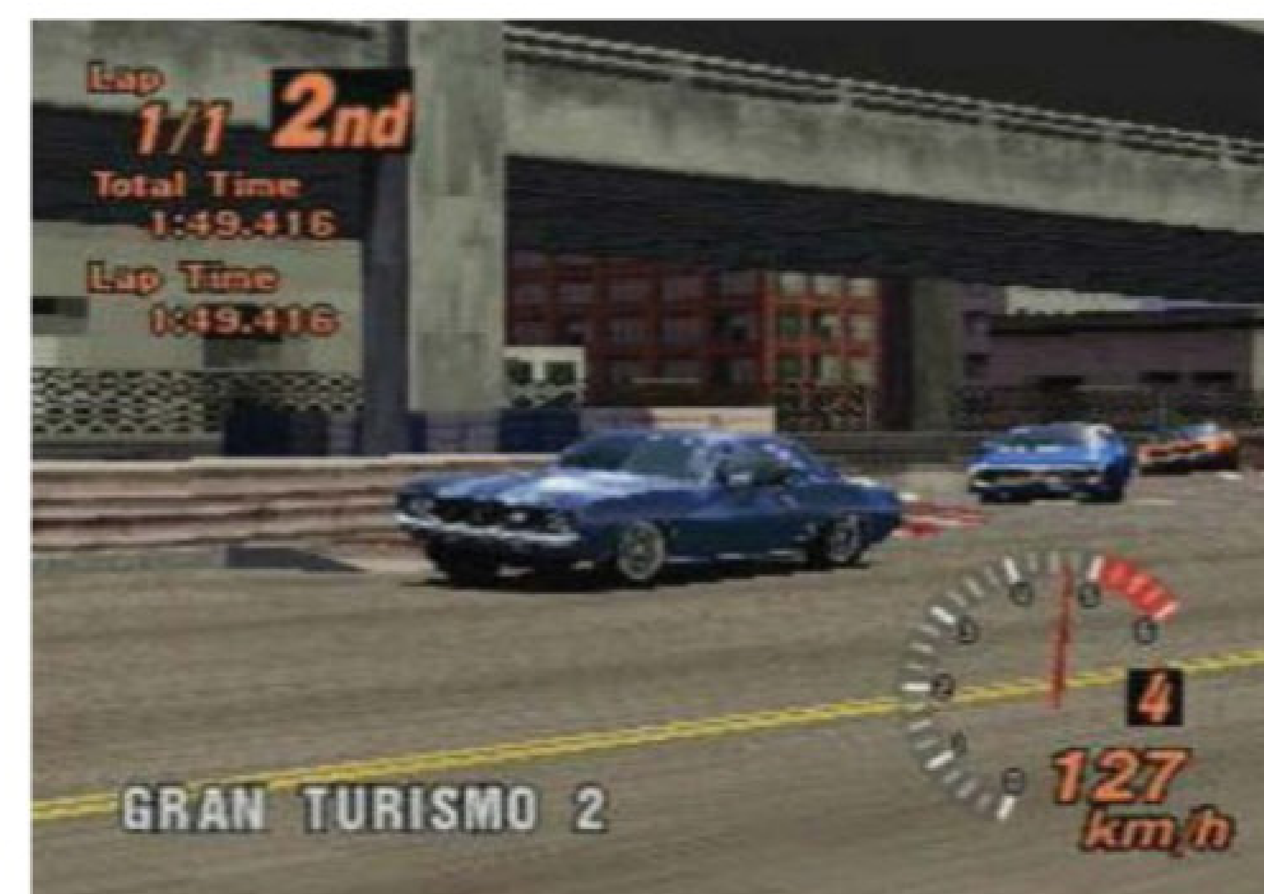
GRAN TURISMO 2

1997

PSone

The first sequel in the series is perhaps the most fondly remembered of the entire franchise. Yamauchi took everything that worked about the original and multiplied it by a factor of ten, improving almost every single area of the game's design. It was regarded as being light years ahead of its time and it's a testament to Yamauchi's vision for the ultimate driving experience, filling the disc with so many cars, tracks and features that it was literally impossible to attain 100 per cent. Okay, so that's a bug in the game, but it's still huge.

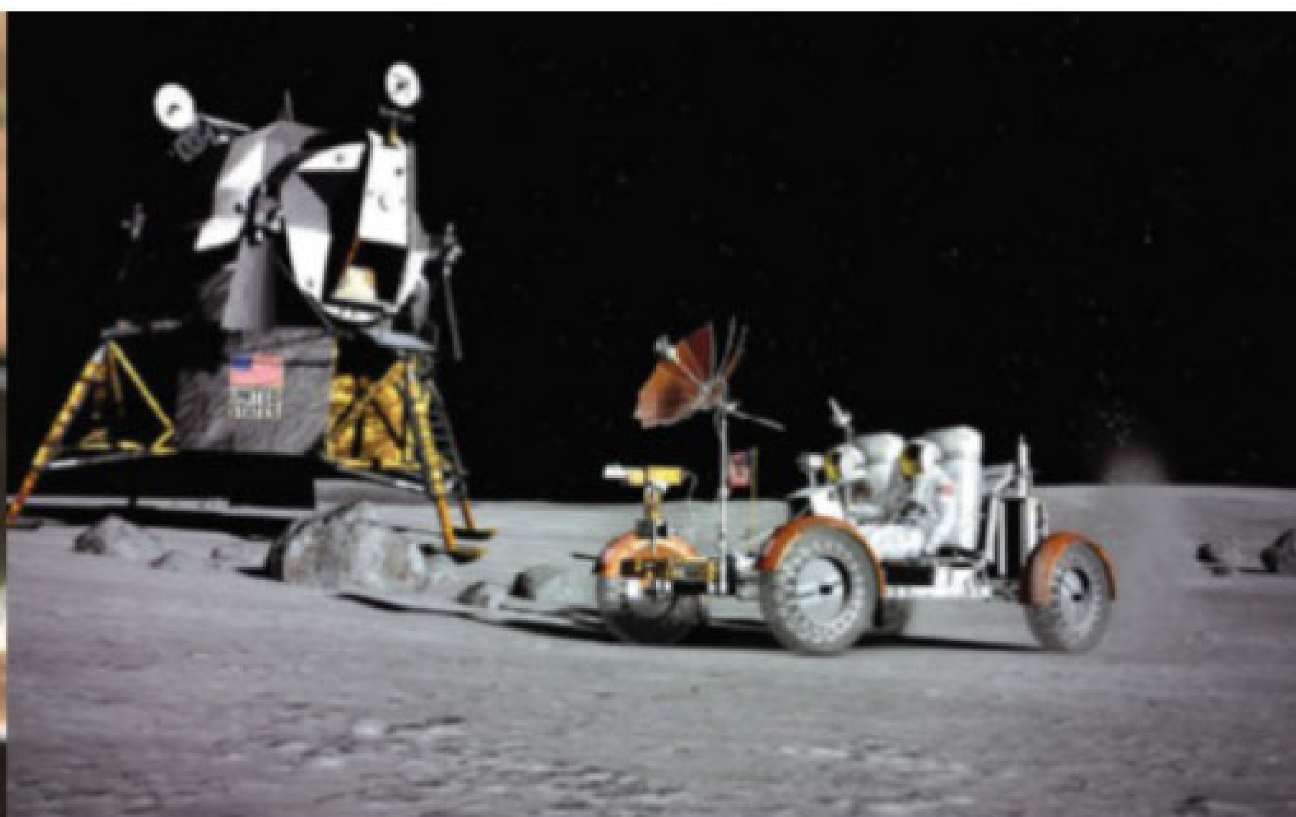






Yamauchi's continued passion for motor racing feeds back into each new Gran Turismo title.





"THE PS3 WAS REALLY, REALLY HARD TO DEVELOP ON. WE ALWAYS HAD TO FIGHT WITH THE AMOUNT OF MEMORY THAT WE HAD AVAILABLE"

Kazunori Yamauchi, Polyphony Digital

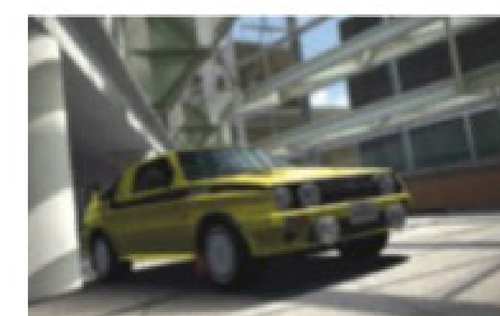


2003

GRAN TURISMO 4 PROLOGUE

PlayStation 2

✪ As the appetite for *GT* grew stronger in anticipation for the third sequel, Polyphony Digital made the unconventional decision to release a taster of the final product. Described as a sneak preview of the full game, it featured a limited selection of cars, tracks and modes for gamers to play as a stop-gap until the complete game was released. While it was controversial, it was a huge success and Polyphony would return to the idea during the prolonged development of *Gran Turismo 5* on PlayStation 3.

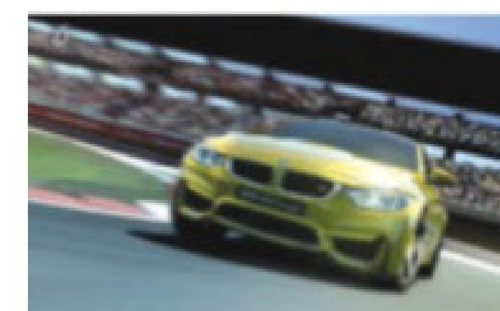


2013

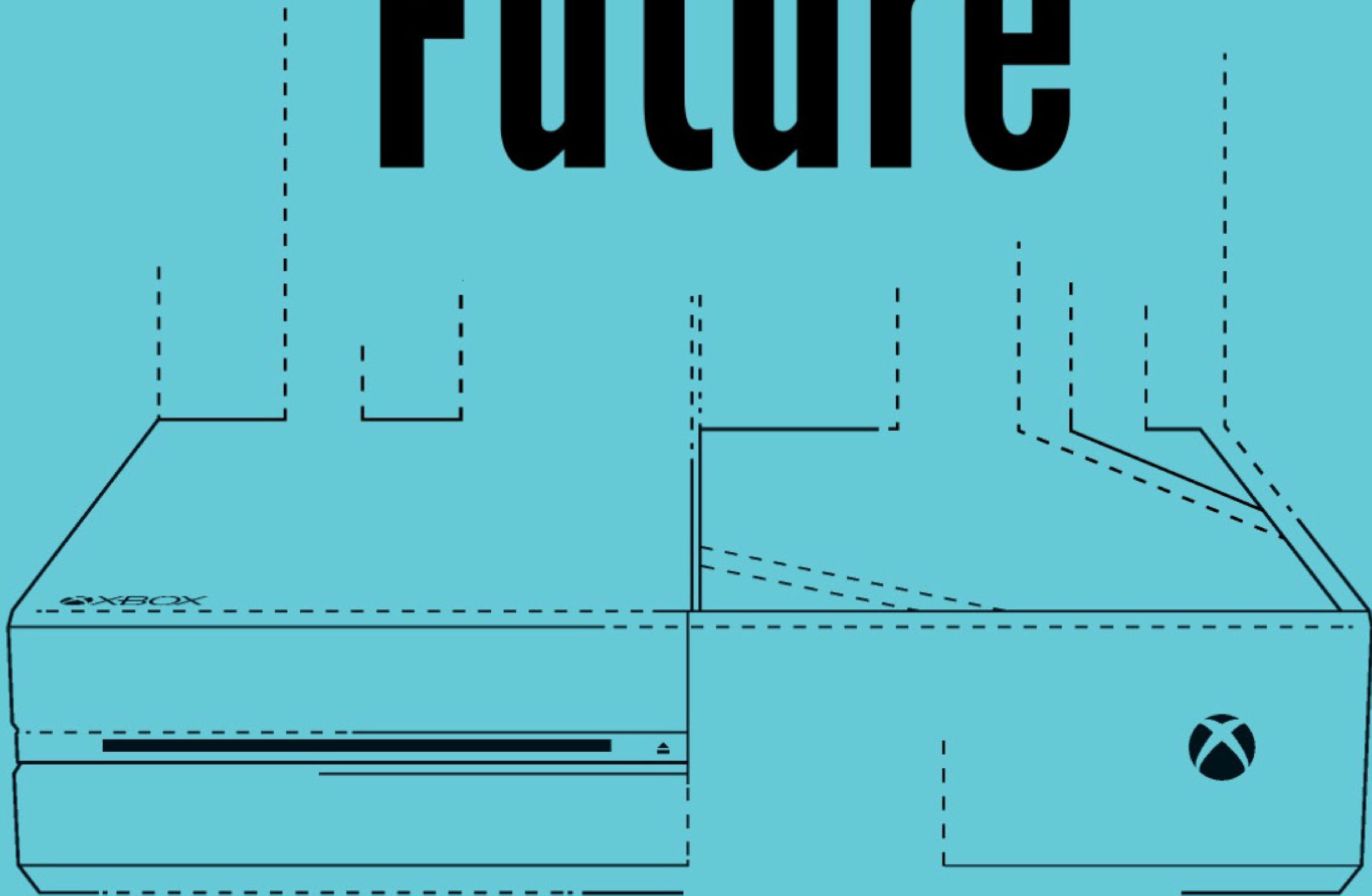
GRAN TURISMO 6

PlayStation 3

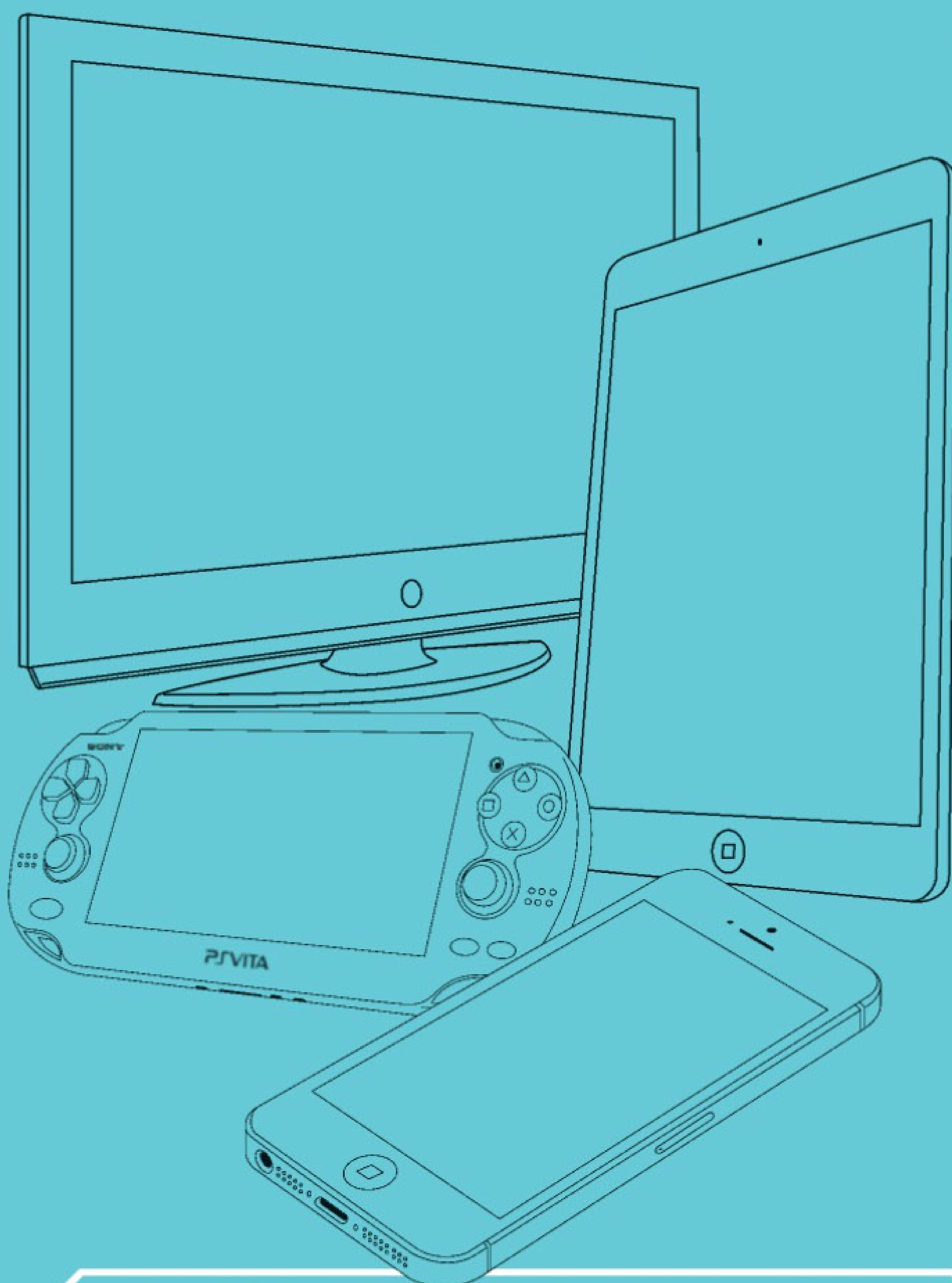
✪ The most recent entry in the series almost suffered from bad timing. Years in the making, *GT6* was released on PlayStation 3 during the launch window of PlayStation 4, which disappointed some fans looking for their first taste of *GT* on Sony's more powerful hardware. With a significant drop in sales over previous entries in the series, Polyphony hopes that the series' PS4 debut in *GT7* will bring the series back on track.



The No Console Future



Gaming is hurtling towards unavoidable transformation. With the average processing capabilities of everything from phones to USB dongles increasing at a rapid rate, the day of traditional consoles is coming to an end



> **"I expect that publishers will offer a PC network for multiplayer at a lower price than $50 or $60 annually, and so gamers will have no real reason to buy a console"**
> **Michael Pachter**

Historically, the videogame industry has been characterised by change. Be it new hardware, new forms of distribution, new types of games or new ways to interact, this is not a medium with a habit of standing still. The only thing that is certain about its future, therefore, is uncertainty.

What will the games, the hardware, the interactions and the means of consumption look like in three, five and ten years from now? Will we still be plugging HDMI cords from a console to a TV, or will such an idea seem retro in 2020? Will we even need a specialised box to play games from at all? Perhaps the medium will follow the lead of films and music and migrate to the proverbial cloud, as we're starting to see with the likes of PlayStation Now and OnLive.

Knowing that things are going to change is the easy bit, but predicting exactly how is difficult. Brian Chambers, senior producer at Crytek, struggles with exactly this. "What I can guarantee is that things are going to change in the future, that much is obvious," Chambers tells us. "This industry has a history of shifting and moving often, so I can't see that changing. New hardware will likely come out that looks different and changes the way we access our games, but things are changing so much in so many different ways that it's hard to predict right now what those changes are going to be precisely.

"I remember hearing five years ago that all boxed retail games were going to die out and that everything would be soon going digital. That hasn't happened. Yes, there is more digital now, but retail isn't dead at all.

"A lot of people I've spoken to about it believe that it is going the way of fewer platforms. Will everything eventually be streamed across the internet and land on your screen via an all-in-one box in your house? I'm not so sure about that."

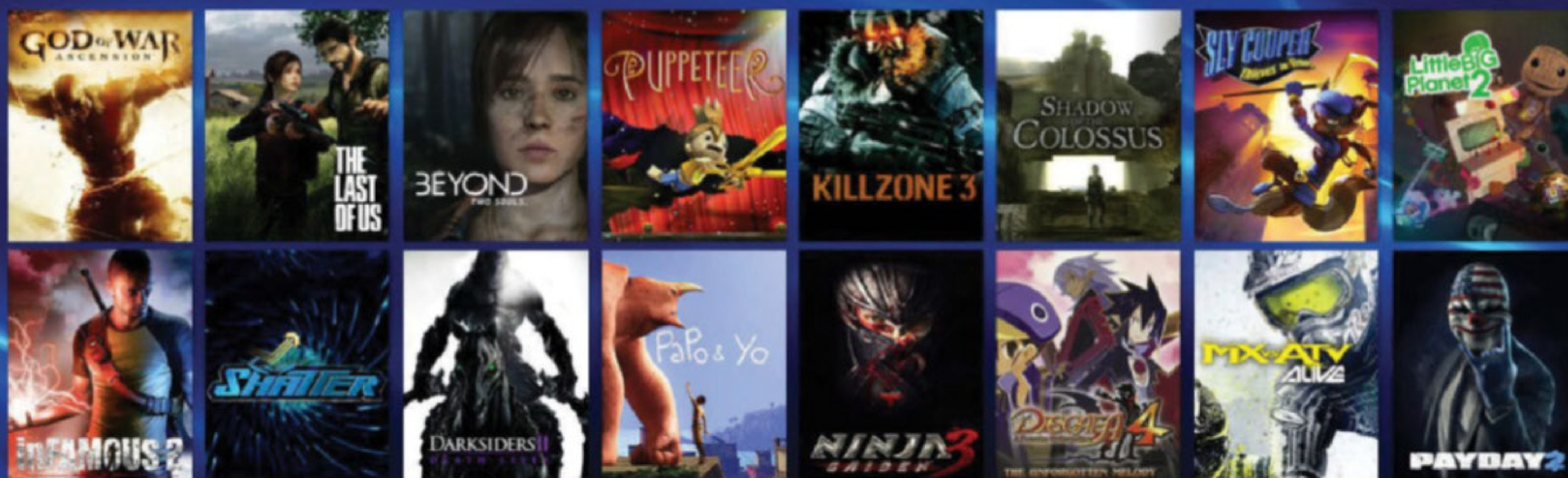
Others disagree with Chambers, firmly believing that an all-in-one box is going to infiltrate our homes and render the current console ecosystem redundant. Even more dramatically, many of these same people suggest that the current console cycle will be the last of the traditional model.

The benefits for the player within such a reality are obvious. A move away from platform-holders competing for a space in your living room will eliminate the increasingly vitriolic culture of exclusive games appearing on a single system, either indefinitely or for a limited time. It would also save us from having to shell out for new systems regularly, enabling us to spend that money on content.

"This may be the last cycle ever, yes," determines Michael Pachter, Wedbush Securities' influential analyst. "The publishers can all make PC games, and people with Chromecast, Amazon Fire, Apple TV or a Roku can connect their PC to their TV wirelessly. I expect that publishers will offer a PC network for multiplayer at a lower price than $50 or $60 annually, and so gamers will have no reason to buy a console… A zero-console future is likely."

According to Pachter, one of the reasons this future has not already come to pass is that publishers are unwilling to buck tradition and work together to create a new financial model that is isolated from typical consoles. However, that's not to say that someone won't attempt to put such a plan into motion.

"It will probably be Activision to buck tradition," predicts Pachter. "The publishers will likely have to pool their resources and create a single PC network with revenue sharing based upon games played. The movie exhibitors already do this with on-screen



PlayStation Now represents a potentially big step forward, with streaming becoming a significant part of the videogame industry's future. The fact that it is limited to Sony products and devices means it still adheres to the archaic console-wars tradition, though.

advertising through National Cinemedia, a joint venture where exhibitors share in revenue based on eyeballs seeing ads."

Such a system would make sense on the surface, working in a way similar to Netflix in that users pay a fee to consume as much content as they desire, revenue then being split between publishers and developers. Not everyone is as adamant as Pachter, however, in thinking that this will be achieved without consoles as part of the landscape. At the least, a diverse range of hardware will be required, whether it takes a recognisable console form.

"I suspect there will be [another generation of] consoles," says Lewis Ward, gaming research director at IDC, "but it's also true that the difference between traditional game consoles and PCs, and probably even tablets and smart TVs, over the next decade will get semantic from a gaming angle.

"At some point the difference in computing and rendering power will be quite small and it will become more about the platform behind it, social capabilities across these devices and monetisation model differences."

When it comes to the current console hardware giants throwing in the towel and moving exclusively into content creation, Ward believes such a thing is not close to happening. "It's possible, but that's a very long way off from my perspective. It'll be at least 2018 before any such announcement is even conceivable."

"If Wii U continues to struggle, I could see increasing pressure on Nintendo to focus on software, but I see no reason why Sony or Microsoft would want to give up. Owning the living room is strategic for both companies. I have zero expectation that one of them will bow out of the console race in the next decade. Competition is healthy for these companies and good for gamers in many respects. Competition leads to innovation, and exciting new gaming experiences are what gamers ultimately want… and will pay for."

Stagnation and laziness is one of the concerns regarding a single-platform future for gaming, with companies relying on tried-and-tested successes rather than exploring new means of expanding and challenging the audience. Not only that, but a single system of play raises questions over 'gate-keeping'. Who, in other words, determines what we can and cannot play?

With multiple providers competing with each other to attract as many users as possible, there is some reason to take risks and do something that the opposition is too timid to attempt. It's these ideas that often provide us with positive change, Microsoft's back tracking on second-hand Xbox One game sales being a recent example. Competition helps keep platform holders honest and, to an extent, fair.

"It would be simpler to have a single platform," agrees *Dragon Age: Inquisition* producer Cameron Lee when asked about whether he would prefer to focus on making games for a single platform. "But then you get into a situation where, if there's a monopoly, problems are going to come up with the types of entertainment you'll be allowed to make. It would be… very restrictive.

"I think having more options for the player is important. It's important for us to make sure that we don't get locked into one particular route and type of game. I think healthy competition is the best way to go. For that reason, I think consoles will continue. It's hard to predict this kind of stuff, but I would expect them to be around for a long time to come."

From the game developers that we've spoken to, the message is clear: there will be more consoles after this latest cycle. Stan Just, producer on *The Witcher 3*, says we're not getting any closer to a single-format future and that he gets the impression "that there are going to be more and more new platforms coming – whether that's new consoles, Steam Machines, mobile devices or even things like Oculus Rift." BioWare Austin manager Jeff Hickman agrees: "Consoles are not going away and I think there will be more consoles after this generation… What those consoles look like is [another] matter."

That is the million-dollar question and the one that every investor, game creator and player wants to know. Those that we've spoken to tend agree on the generalities of what these consoles are going to be. They're going to be access points, devices from which your games can be accessed either via an online storage or directly from a disc or personal hard drive. It's this ability to access content that the hardware wars of the future will be won.

In this sense, Valve is taking the fight directly to the likes of Sony and Microsoft with its upcoming Steam Machines. By giving you an easier means to access your PC games from the comfort of your own couch, why would you need another home gaming device at all?

"Steam Machines are an attempt to wholesale lift the PC gaming ecosystem and set it down in the living room," continues Ward. "It's been possible to play games on the living room's big screen using a PC for years, of course, but Valve is taking a much more unified approach to this than any company before it."

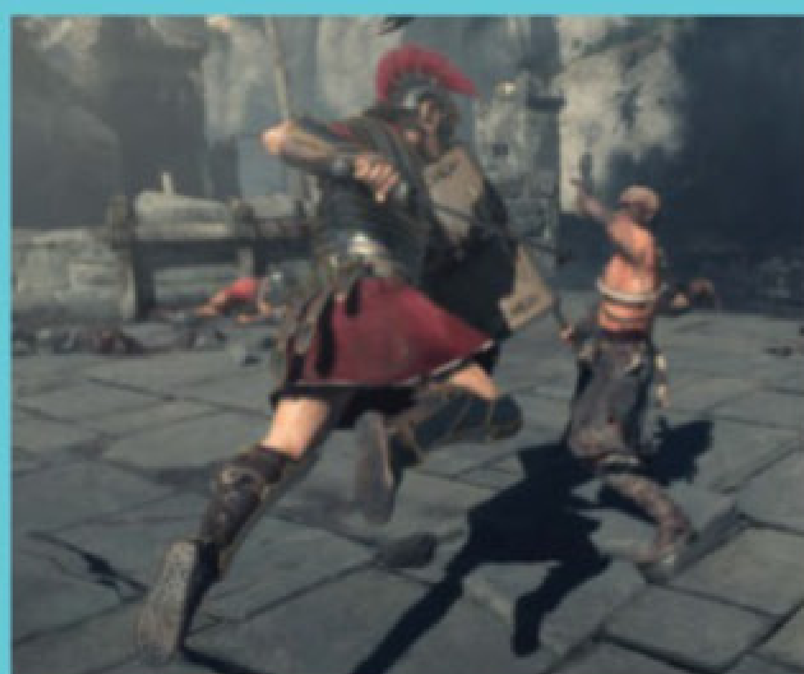
> "Steam Machines are an attempt to wholesale lift the PC gaming ecosystem and set it down in the living room" Lewis Ward







Could this really be the last generation of consoles? It would be a terrible shame to miss out on the wooden smiles and awkward handshakes dished out by execs on launch day…



Brian Chambers, senior producer on Crytek's *Ryse*, is unsure about wholesale game-streaming

Pachter fails to see the real value in such a box, though, especially in the face of internet-connected devices capable of streaming content. "Steam could be the thing that connects PC to TV, but the truth is, something like Chromecast is entirely sufficient and a lot cheaper. I see a migration to this kind of proprietary network happening, with people playing games either from the cloud or simply from their existing PC connected to a TV over Wi-Fi."

When viewed within the framework of a future proprietary network, the idea of a Steam Machine seems archaic and different from a modern console in only the most negligible of ways. It remains a box designed to play games from a specific library, it is not an all-encompassing access point from which we can enjoy all games.

"It's going to be increasingly more important going forwards into the future for devices to be less specialised, not more or equally specialised than they already are," explains Hickman. "We're already seeing it now in that some of the games I own can be played on my PC, my phone and my console. That's going to be the future and devices [will] have to adapt to take that into account, because it's what people want."

Sony has taken steps in improving its distribution model, both with its cross-buy options and the upcoming PlayStation Now. In line with what many of those we've spoken to have been saying, PlayStation Now represents a streaming service that enables you to access your games from one of many devices, whether it's your PlayStation, your Sony TV or your PS Vita. While this is a step forward, it is still a far cry from what a centralised streaming and/or downloading system could potentially provide.

> "It's going to be increasingly more important going forwards into the future for devices to be less specialised, not more or equally specialised than they already are" Jeff Hickman

BATTLE FOR THE LIVING ROOM

As of right now, there are a number of alternatives to the traditional 'big three' console manufacturers, with new companies increasingly interested in providing videogame services through our television set. Here are some examples available to buy today



OnLive

The most well-known of today's game-streaming services, OnLive can display its catalogue of games on your TV through a variety of means. LG's Google TV has a dedicated OnLive of its own, although you will need to buy the official OnLive control pad (£40) to interact with the available games. Other TVs require you to either purchase OnLive's £70 Game System or stream the games through your PC/laptop and use your TV as a monitor. A monthly subscription is required to access OnLive, although free trials are available.



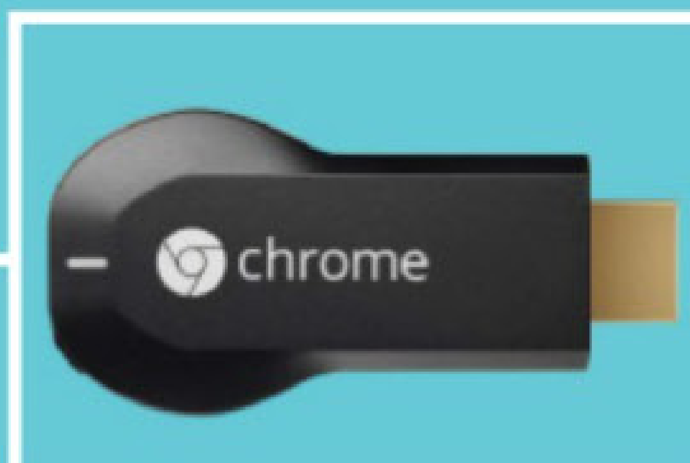
Amazon Fire TV

Having been available in the US since April 2014, Amazon is bringing its Fire TV to the UK on 23 October for £79. So long as you also purchase a Fire Game Controller, you can download a range of games to play on your TV – from *Minecraft* to *The Walking Dead*. The device is primarily designed for streaming, however, so don't be surprised to see cloud-gaming services become available for it in the near future.



Ouya

The Andriod-powered, crowd-funded Ouya has hardly been a runaway success since its public launch in 2013, but the platform continues to provide good ideas. Earlier this year Ouya Everywhere was announced, the idea being to take the Ouya platform away from a single box and embedding it into other, existing devices – making games you own accessible through a range of options. It remains to be seen which devices will be included.



Chromecast

Google's Chromecast is not just about streaming web-based content – it can also be used to display your PC games through your TV. It's called 'screen mirroring', with your PC doing the processing, while Chromecast captures the image and displays it on your TV. Get yourself a wireless game controller and/or keyboard and mouse and you're all set to play PC games from the comfort of your sofa, rather than sitting at your desk. For £30 it's not a bad option to have.



Apple TV

Much has been written about Apple TV, not all of it positive. Like OnLive, however, the system might just have been a victim of being too ahead of its time, consumers at the time still uncomfortable with systems that attempted to abandon physical products entirely. The downside to Apple TV's gaming options is that you're limited to accessing only those products available on Apple products… unless you jailbreak it, of course.

STEAM MACHINE CHEAT SHEET

So commentators have indicated that Valve's Steam Machines will represent an enormous disruption to the traditional console model, acting as a transitional device towards an increasing focus on PC-powered gaming. Here's what you need to know:

Available games:
Any Linux-capable games available on Steam. Additionally, Steam Machines can be used to stream Windows-based games from your PC or laptop onto your TV screen.

Operating system:
SteamOS, a Linux-based system.



Inputs:
Given the flexibility of the operating system, you're free to choose your own input device. Valve is developing a Steam Controller, which features a touchpad designed to provide sensitivity equal to that of a mouse.

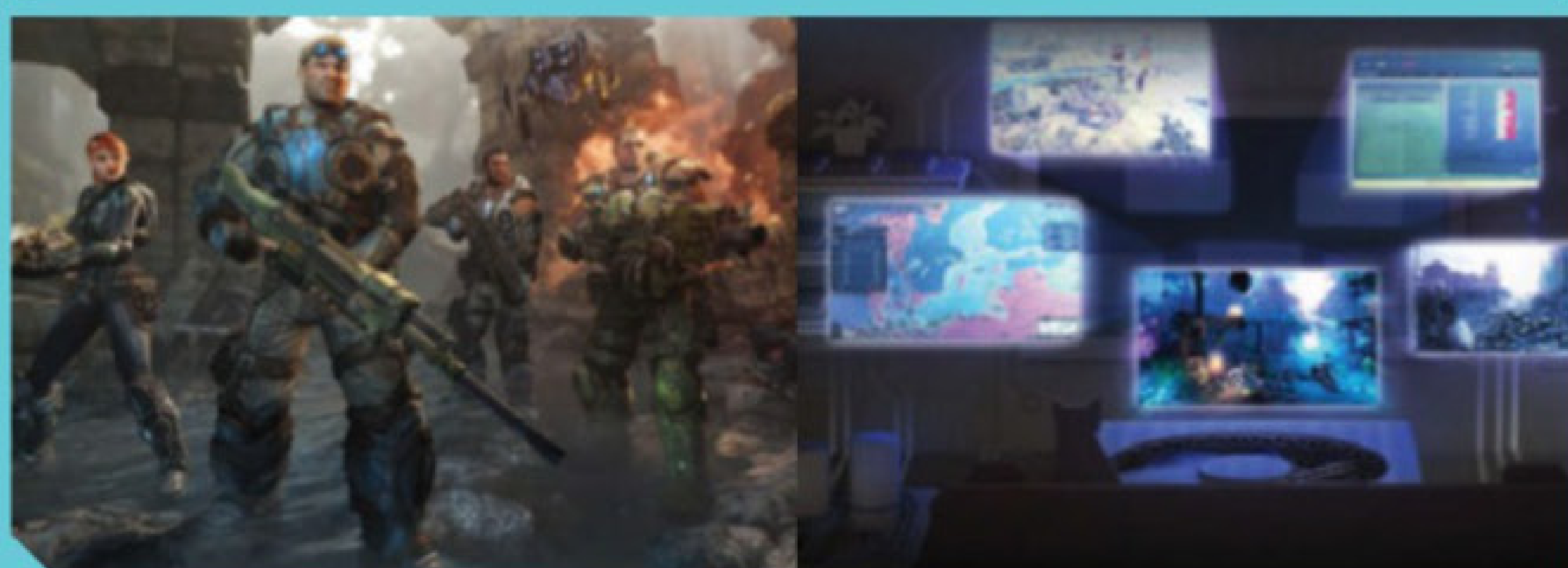
Manufacturer:
Various – part of the appeal of the Steam Machines is that a range of different units will be available, consumers selecting one that fits their needs and budget.

Release date:
TBA 2015.

Price:
Expect huge variation between different Steam Machines depending on their included features, hardware specifications and component quality.



The likes of Michael Pachter believe that the future rests in publishers joining forces and offering their games through a subscription model, much in the same way that Netflix offers films and TV.



Through PlayStation Now, you are limited to playing Sony games through Sony products – it's nowhere near as attractive as the multi-publisher network put forward by Pachter. Far from engaging a genuine formatless future, PlayStation Now is an attempt to strengthen the Sony formats. It is not an attempt to diversify and modernise how we consume games.

What's most interesting is the fact that many seem to agree that moving away from specialised devices represents the future, but how we ultimately get there remains an issue – as demonstrated by the lack of publisher support for platform-agnostic game streaming. "From a development perspective, the opinions about how we access games in the future changes dramatically depending on who you talk you," says Chambers. "If you could stream all of your games to the device you choose then that would be great. Ultimately, though, the designers themselves don't really care how you get your games.

"The designer just wants to make great games, and so long as you can access them in a way that works, then that's good enough. Same goes for creative directors, animators and other creative people in the industry. "As far as the business model goes, the question is very different," Chambers continues. "If streaming enables you to update content quickly and regularly and get access to older games, then it becomes a different financial problem. It might be considered a good option because developing new games is expensive and if you can get people to buy old ones or update existing ones then that makes money.

"On the other hand, it might be considered a disadvantage because people might not buy new games so much. There are always going to be people that want to play new games. It's hard to say if something like a wide-reaching streaming service would be an advantage or a disadvantage, because there are so many types of games and so many people that want to play them."

But there's one thing to always keep in mind, however: "The playing of good games is the most important thing, no matter how you access them," says Chambers. "I know what I do to access games, and I can safely assume that what I do to access them in five years is going to be different. All I hope is that the way I access them doesn't result in any detriment to the game, be that through the business model or anything else."

SURVIVING THE WASTELAND

In an exclusive editorial, Wasteland director Brian Fargo discusses the arduous ordeal of bringing a sequel 26 years in the making to life

It seemed like aeons ago, but it was just late 2011 that I was giving a speech at the Shanghai GDC about the seemingly hopeless future of the classic single-player CRPG. The industry seemed to offer little hope for a mid-size development company, much less one that could work on the kind of games I like to build. Facebook games, free-to-play and multiplayer was where all the heat was. I still yearned for the immersive experience that the top RPGs offered, hours of losing yourself in another world.

The industry was re-inventing itself at a rate that made the Nineties look like child's play. On one end of the spectrum you had the number of triple-A developers diminishing quickly due to the cost of development exploding. Then on the other end you had smaller groups with no barrier to entry and better tools than ever releasing games on a near minute-by-minute basis. Discoverability became the key factor and without it your game doesn't exist. What to do?

And then along comes the concept of crowd-funding. In the past we had the dual gatekeepers of retail and publishers who would decide what got on the shelf or in some cases whether we could even get on digital sites like Xbox Live. I knew there was an audience for the ambitious CRPG but I was unable to get traction in the traditional ways. »

“SO HERE I SIT ON THE PRECIPICE OF THE RELEASE OF WASTELAND 2, A GAME I’VE BEEN TRYING TO MAKE HAPPEN FOR 26 YEARS”

BRIAN FARGO, FOUNDER INXILE ENTERTAINMENT

InXile was at a crossroads in its future when I read about Double Fine's success on Kickstarter. I knew instantly that this would be the last and only chance to make these games.

Often in business you will hear about the need for the 'pivot'. This usually entails a quick and meaningful adjustment to the approach of your strategy in light of new market conditions. Crowd-funding exemplified a new approach and I knew we needed to move quickly. In a short time we put a campaign together that both channelled my frustration dealing with the traditional means of finance and helped to communicate the type of game we wanted to build. I knew that launching a campaign would be tantamount to flogging myself in the public square. A failure would be seen by my friends, my peers and my family. The pressure was intense. We launched our Kickstarter on 13 March and the response was quick and successful with us having achieved our funding goal of $900,000 in 43 hours. We were back in the RPG business!

However our interaction with our audience was only beginning as they were now going to be part of the development process. We had a strong vision for what the game needed to be and defined core elements, but it was time to bring more voices into the process. I have always sought out different opinions during development of my games, be it from my QA department or from my peers, but now I could broaden that concept. Part of me felt like it was risky and alien to show things at an earlier stage than normal, but getting that feel for general ideas and opinion trends in comments provided so much value. Iteration in games has always been the most important part of the process for me and having thousands of folks looking at it from different perspectives protected us from any surprise issues at launch. I've always said you aren't making a game until you are playing the game.

As part of our Kickstarter rewards we promised an early copy of the game, in part to solicit more meaningful feedback. But then, some months after our campaign closed, Early Access was created and we decided to offer the beta version of the game to people who missed out on the Kickstarter. I felt there was some risk in providing an early version of a narrative-based game but I knew the feedback would be invaluable. Sure enough it was, as our audience helped us shape the UI, the economy, address compatibility issues and remind us what was important. Wherever our final reviews end up, I know that getting the audience in early on made the game better.

When you solicit feedback internally it is always tricky for folks to be 100 per cent honest since they don't want to hurt other's feelings, or have the sense that something is too late to fix. The fans playing the game certainly have no fear of hurt feelings with their feedback and it's important for us to hear it during the phase we can actually do something about it. I've looked at the beta program as a way to move the feedback that you would normally get post-launch into the development process, when we can do something about it.

Beyond all the development changes and new financing I've had other positive effects from all of this. Crowd funding has created a tighter relationship with my fellow developers like Obsidian, Larian, Double Fine, and numerous smaller outfits. A new kind of camaraderie for which we support each other with little eye towards the competitive angle that normally exists.

And I feel more connected with the audience in a way that was previously possible in the Nineties. There was no social media during the Interplay heyday and the energy I receive from the fans pushes us all harder to deliver something special.

So here I sit on the precipice of the release of *Wasteland 2*, a game I've been trying to make happen for 26 years. I'm not sure whether I'm more nervous prior to the actual launch of the game or the Kickstarter campaign. The feedback from our fans, the reviews and the sales at launch can help set a future that allows us to continue making the RPGs we love for many years.

Get prepared!



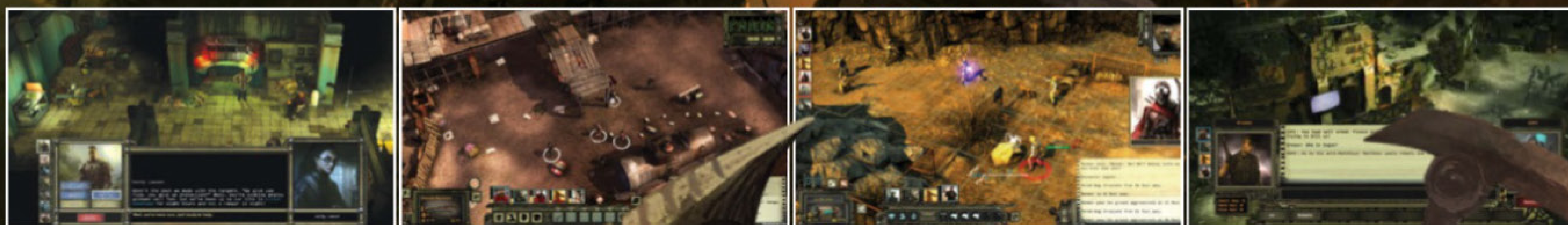
■ The CRPG, or computer role-playing game, was once a hotbed for great story-telling in the industry.



"I KNEW THAT LAUNCHING A CAMPAIGN WOULD BE TANTAMOUNT TO FLOGGING MYSELF IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE. A FAILURE WOULD BE SEEN BY MY FRIENDS, MY PEERS AND MY FAMILY. THE PRESSURE WAS INTENSE."

BRIAN FARGO, FOUNDER INXILE ENTERTAINMENT

■ The success of Double Fine on Kickstarter is what inspired Brian Fargo to pursue crowd-funding for *Wasteland 2* and reach directly to the fanbase.



THE NON-SEQUELS

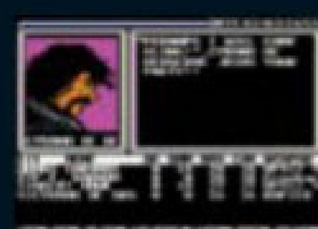
FOUR GAMES THAT REPRESENTED SORT-OF SEQUELS TO THE ORIGINAL



FOUNTAIN OF DREAMS

FORMAT: MS-DOS
RELEASE: 1990

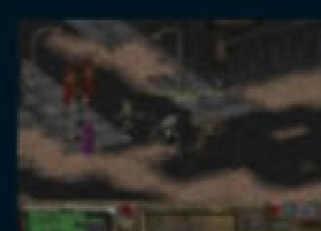
ORIGINALLY DEVELOPED as a follow-up to *Wasteland* (despite neither Interplay nor any of the creative team actually being involved in its development), Electronic Arts shortly cut ties with the *Wasteland* licence shortly before the game was release. However, the similarities are there, with similar gameplay and a plot set in a post-nuclear war Florida. The game was much derided, particularly by *Wasteland* fans for its brevity.



MEANTIME

FORMAT: Apple II
RELEASE: Cancelled

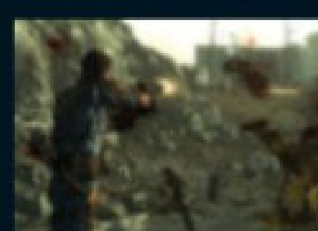
WITH DEVELOPMENT starting in 1989, Interplay intended *Meantime* to serve as a spin-off to *Wasteland* (with the same engine and emulating the gameplay) set in its universe. However, it didn't have many similarities outside of its core gameplay. The game involved time travel, recruiting historical figures such as Wernher von Braun and Amelia Earhart to your party and tackle time-travelling bandits ripping a hole through the space-time continuum.



FALLOUT

FORMAT: MS-DOS, PC
RELEASE: 1997

WELL KNOWN as the spiritual successor to *Wasteland*, *Fallout* was originally developed by Interplay as an official one but failed to gain back the rights to the property. Nevertheless, the similarities are overt as both feature the world ravaged by nuclear war and there's even references to *Wasteland* hidden within – For example, an NPC named Tycho will mention Fat Freddy, a character located in *Wasteland*'s Las Vegas.



FALLOUT 3

FORMAT: Multi
RELEASE: 2008

WHAT THE franchise might have been had it continued to grow under its original title, *Fallout 3* continued to push the RPG genre in three dimensions. With a vivid wasteland to roam and a series of gameplay enhancements that demonstrate the harsh realities of surviving the wilderness, it's one of the finest games of all time. However, now far from its origins, *Wasteland* fans wanted a return to the principles of the original.







In the same way that a novelist may get better and better as their career progresses, a director gets a clearer and clearer idea of their vision, a developer or producer for games gets better at running their part of the show within a gaming studio. We spoke to industry veterans about the game that started their careers, what it taught them, and whether it was a baptism of fire into the industry or a rite of passage...



NATHAN VELLA

CAPYBARA GAMES, STUDIO HEAD

In 2003, there was no development going on in [Toronto,] so 12 of us – me and my friends, just hobbyists at the time – started work on a game called *Super Shove Shove*, a block-based puzzle game where you can use a hot glove to expand girders and a cold glove to shrink them. You had a limited number of charges and it sounds like I'm super biased, but the game was really awesome!

It was a super simple puzzle game made for phones before the smartphone advent, and I did the pixel art for it. That's where I started at Capy, actually – as a pixel artist. We decided to start on the old mobile platforms because none of us had ever really made a game before, and you had anywhere between 54KB and 500KB to make a game on phones back then. Very limited, and we thought that limitation would help us out – we didn't want to just dive in and make an MMO!

I still think it's a great game; it's pretty and I think it's a real rad game. There might be like, one person that reads this that played it, but I think it was really cool that we could make this game in purely our own time and then get it published. We showed Disney that game, and they gave us a contract to make a licensed mobile game of the *Cars* movie, and that actually started the studio, so it has a really warm spot in my heart.





NAOKI YOSHIDA

SQUARE ENIX, PRODUCER/DIRECTOR



The first game I worked on was never actually released; it was called *Tengai Makyou 3* and was built for NEC's PC-FX system. 70 per cent of the game was finished, but it just never came to hit the market, which is a real shame because it was very highly anticipated among the players and fans. At that time, the *Tengai Makyou* series was known as one of the 'four major RPGs' in Japan, along with *Final Fantasy*, *Dragon Quest* and *Megami Tensei*. A GameCube version came out later, but that was a different game to the one that I worked on.

I joined the industry as a producer and the first game I ever worked on was the second Pixar *Cars* game on Nintendo DS. *Cars Mater-National Championship*, it was called.

When I looked back over the first one it was just full of mini-games… 'Mini-games!?' I said. '*Cars* is about racing, surely! Let's make a racing game!' It was a fun game to work on and, being that first experience for me, it still holds a very special place in my heart. It was a small team, something like 12 people, but they were great to work with, and it was a fun title to work on.





CAMERON LEE

BIOWARE EDMONTON, PRODUCER



BRIAN CHAMBERS

CRYTEK FRANKFURT, SENIOR PRODUCER



When I was starting in the industry, I was the animation director of a small visual effects company. What we had, though, was one of the first optical motion capture stages… it was a Vicon 8. Clients came to use that, wanted help with their animation and we would do that for them.

I can't remember the exact game that I first worked on, but it was one of the *Might & Magic* games on 3DO. It's really hard to pinpoint exactly which *Might & Magic* games because there were so many of them, but it dates back to something like 15 years ago. Those were good times, actually.

"GAME MAKING STARTS AS AN ART"



JEFF HICKMAN

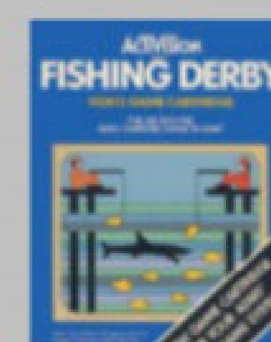
BIOWARE AUSTIN, GENERAL MANAGER

The first game that I was personally involved in was *Dark Age Of Camelot*. In some cases, the processes of game design, [between then and now], have changed dramatically, but in other cases it hasn't changed at all. Sometimes we get caught up, as far as the development processes go, in being too structured about how we make games. Working on *Dark Age Of Camelot* made me believe that game making starts as an art, then becomes a process.

With our upcoming game *Shadow Realms*, I have given the creative director almost total creative freedom and almost no process limitations. That allows us to explore lots of different things. As the game then starts to get built you begin to hone in on what the game actually is and that's when you need to employ processes to make sure it actually gets built.

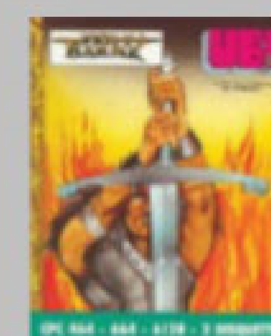
SMALL BEGINNINGS

Even giant publishers have to start somewhere – here are some of their first games on the market



ACTIVISION
YEAR FOUNDED: 1979
FIRST GAME: Fishing Derby (1980)

A long way from *Destiny* or *Call Of Duty*, *Fishing Derby* took a side-on perspective and tasked two players with getting their line to the bottom of the screen, avoiding obstacles and catching fish in the process



UBISOFT
YEAR FOUNDED: 1986
FIRST GAME: Fer et flamme (1986)

Before Ubisoft took the world by storm with *Rayman*, it worked on a variety of smaller games – its first was a graphical adventure game for the Amstrad CPC.



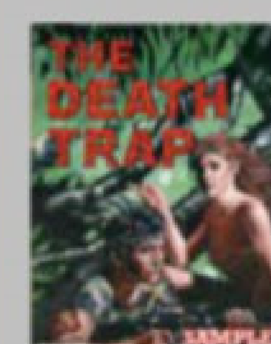
NAMCO
YEAR FOUNDED: 1982
FIRST GAME: Gee Bee (1983)

Gee Bee was the first game Namco developed itself – a curious arcade cabinet-meets-virtual pinball game – with the majority of the designing done by Pac-Man creator Tōru Iwatani.



ELECTRONIC ARTS
YEAR FOUNDED: 1982
FIRST GAME: Archon: The Light and Dark (1983)

EA didn't develop *Archon*, but it was the first game it distributed: the game was visually similar to chess, but took a deeper strategic inspiration from fantasy fiction so popular at the time.



SQUARE
YEAR FOUNDED: 1986
FIRST GAME: The Death Trap (1984)

Released before Square was even a real company (operating under a power line manufacturer Den-Yu-Sha), *The Death Trap* was only ever released in Japan – a sort of interactive novel/adventure game released for the NEC PC-8801.



PETER MOLYNEUX

22CANS, FOUNDER AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR

My very first game was called *The Entrepreneur* back in 1984, and that was a business sim game where you ran a business and had to make it successful. It was a text-based game, but I've always loved creating these crazy simulations.

It was never published, as such, but I did take out an advert out in a computer magazine at the time and it sold a total of two copies… and I think it was my mum that bought them. From that game, I think I learnt that it's no good just making a game… you've got to make sure you know people know about it, and that was the first harsh lesson. You've got to think about getting the world excited about the game almost as much as thinking about what the game actually *is*. The concept of a business game simulator isn't the most exciting idea to people, so you've really got to think about an idea that'd be exciting to you *and* your audience. Even today, you'd be hard-pushed to make a business simulator game successful.

It was just me that made that game, and I worked insanely hard on it. One of the hardest thing I did was copying the tapes – because I did that all by hand. I'm still proud of it, but then I'm proud of every game I've worked on in one way or another.

"IT'S NO GOOD JUST MAKING A GAME; PEOPLE HAVE TO KNOW ABOUT IT"

Two Worlds II was the first ever game that I worked on, which was quite a big one to start on now that I look back on it… It was a game that taught me a lot of lessons, especially about the development processes associated with creating fantasy roleplay games. The processes have changed quite a lot in that time, though; it's not just a case of increasing the scale of what you do to match what the latest hardware can do. The engines and programmes that we use nowadays has changed things dramatically and it allows us to get much more efficiency out of each person involved in making the game – something we didn't really have back on *Two Worlds II*.

Right now, I manage four different teams and the content that they combine to create is so complicated that I don't think it would be possible to keep track of everything properly without the systems that the new software lets us create.

"TWO WORLDS II WAS A BIG ONE TO START ON, NOW I LOOK BACK..."



STAN JUST

CD PROJEKTRED, ART PRODUCER







JAMES GOLDING

EPIC GAMES, LEAD FRAMEWORK PROGRAMMER



Ohhh, this is incredibly embarrassing, but my first game wasn't for Epic – it was for a company before that, which was called MathEngine, and we were brought in to work on a 'virtual model posing' game called *Primal Image, Volume I*. We worked in Japan (for a Japanese developer), and were bought in purely to do the posing side of things with our Karma physics engine – we worked on all the physics emulation stuff.

You had to pose and take pictures of this Japanese pop idol, and I must stress the developer was very keen this was a family title: they put lots of restrictions in there to make sure nothing inappropriate happened! It was a very strange title, and being in an office in Tokyo, having just left university, trying to figure out the joint limits of this pop star was very surreal but interesting at the same time.

I got into it because I was working for this middleware company and the developer contacted them asking 'Can you make this game for us?' and MathEngine pretty much said yes to anything, so suddenly I find myself flying out to Japan to help make this game. That's the thing with middleware, you get some projects you never thought you'd end up working on.

My first job in the games industry was in Quality Assurance at Sony, but while I was working in QA, I was also building my level design portfolio during my nights and weekends. My game of choice was *F.E.A.R.*, the supernatural horror FPS by Monolith. Just as I had about burned out on QA, I discovered that a small studio outside of Houston, TX was looking for level designers for the next *F.E.A.R.* expansion pack, *Perseus Mandate*. Lucky for me, they felt I'd be a perfect fit.

In my six months in Texas, I learned the ins and outs of source control, level building, and working with all the departments on a dev team. It felt very old-school – there were a number of huge CRT monitors in the office – but was an incredibly valuable learning experience. And on top of it all, I was working there the day the *BioShock* demo came out, and I played it through in front of the whole company. Our jaws hit the floor. Little did I know how important that moment would be to my future...



STEVE GAYNOR

CO-FOUNDER, FULLBRIGHT



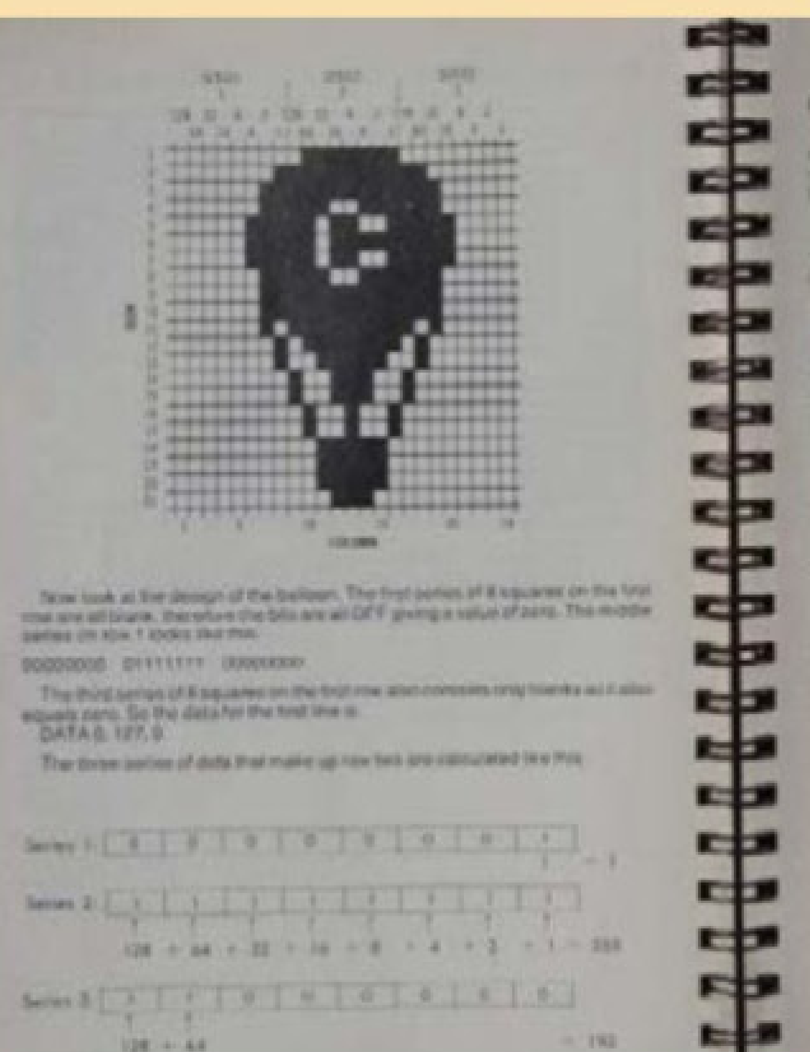


CHET FALISZEK

WRITER, VALVE SOFTWARE

While I had made some dumb text games on my Timex Sinclair, even then I didn't consider them "real" games. My first "real" game was on my Commodore 64. I entered the code from the manual to have a balloon fly across the screen. It amazed me to see something I wrote moving across my TV.

I probably watched it for 20 minutes until I thought of the next step… I added a gun to shoot the balloon down. It was all downhill from there as my next step was to include a little stick figure falling from my "flaming" balloon.





The first videogame I worked on was a *Resident Evil* point-and-click adventure built in PowerPoint for an IT project on, "How to use PowerPoint in the Workplace". I'm not sure if it's what my teacher actually wanted, but as a 13-year-old student I certainly enjoyed it. 10/10 in **games™**? Probably not!

The first videogame I worked on for an actual job with actual money was the first *Fable*. I managed to blag a week of work experience at Lionhead Studios in 2003, and a little while afterwards this turned into a one month Testing contract, which became three months, which became six months, which became ten whole years in various different roles, the final of which was leading the *Fable Anniversary* project.

The first *Fable* was and still is a very special game, or "Project Ego" as it was known when I joined. Like most people, I had read all about it in many magazines and interviews before and I wasn't let down. Sure, it had been scaled back in some areas for technical reasons, but the world, the atmosphere and the music was unlike any other experience I'd had back then and that remains to this day. I was very proud to be a part of that team, it was a project unlike any other.



TED TIMMINS

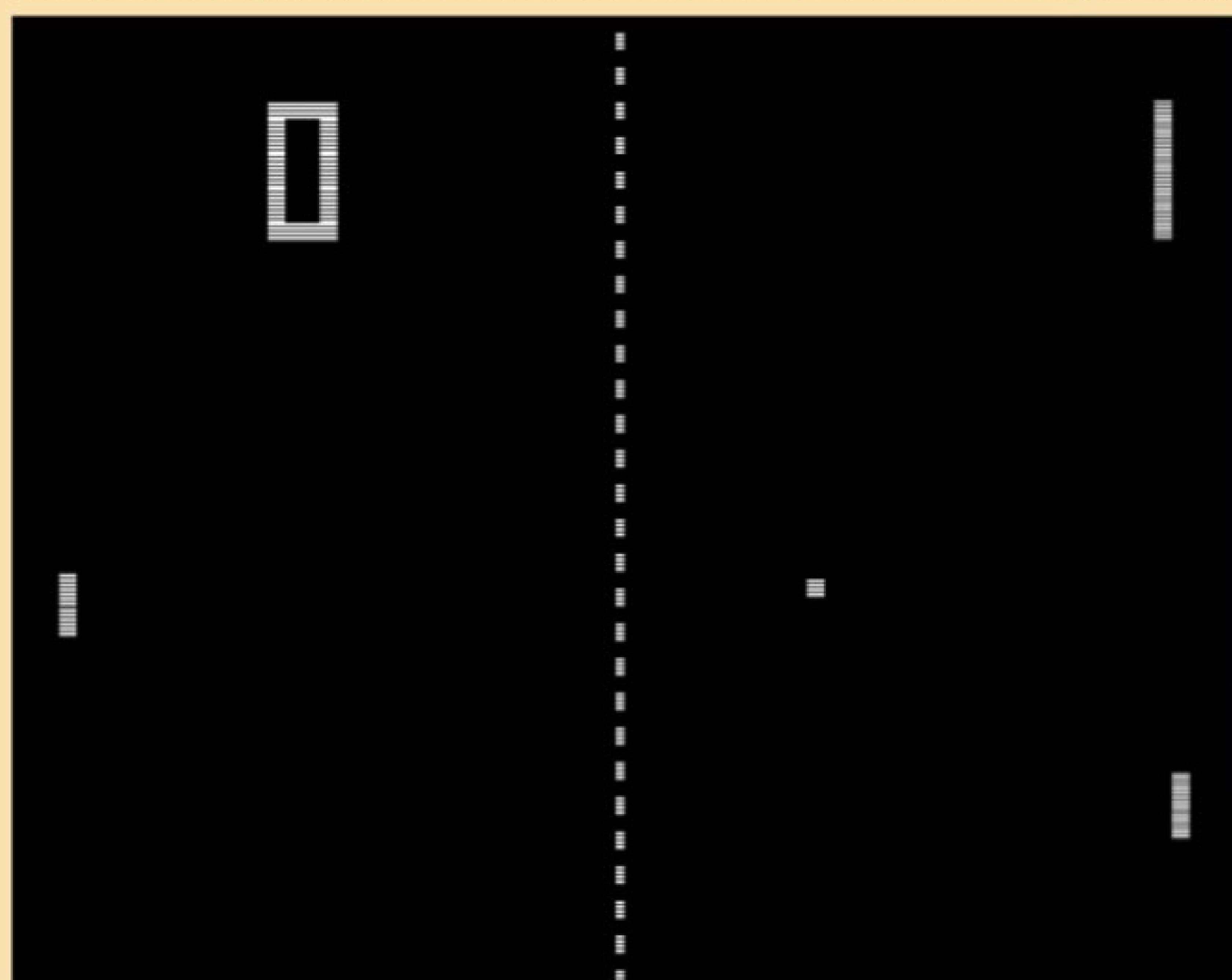
FORMER LEAD DESIGN, LIONHEAD STUDIOS

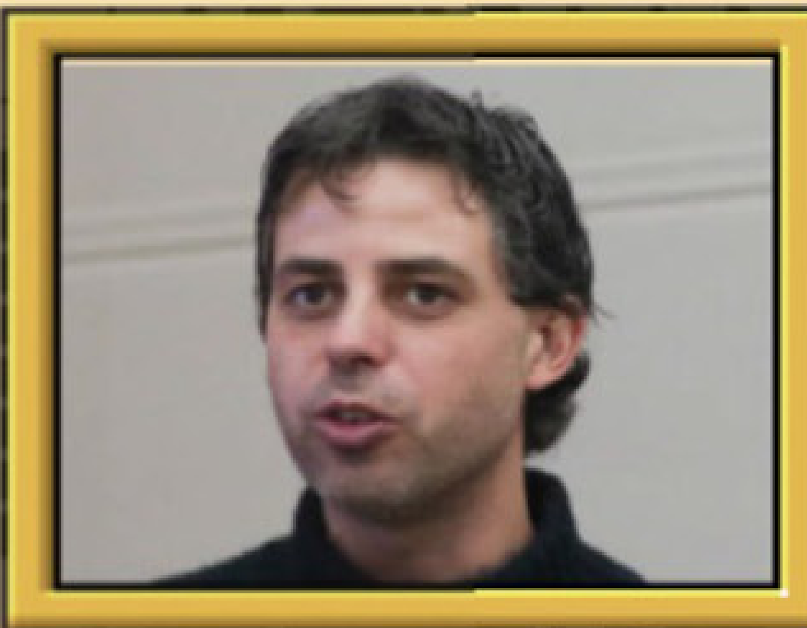
The first game I worked on was a remake of *Pong* for Atari/Hasbro on PS1. Fresh out of University I moved to Leamington Spa to work for Supersonic Software as an artist/designer. While I had worked with computers before and had taught myself various 2D and 3D graphics packages, this was all new. It was great fun diving into a whole new world, learning this new software, working with the programmers and other artists and designers to release my first game! If I hadn't started at a small, fun, games company I would never have experienced all the various facets of working on a game and my knowledge would be much more limited. The games we make at Nnooo are definitely borne out of this foundation.



NIC WATT

CREATIVE DIRECTOR, NNOOO





SEBASTIAN ENRIQUE

PRODUCER, EA SPORTS



My first game was actually *FIFA 06* – I'm just 100% a football guy! I entered development when the game was nearly done, so I primarily put together the demos for PS2 and Xbox. What I learned in three months was that it's *really* hard to make a game. Making a demo teaches you how to make a final product, and seeing all the different elements come together; the graphics, the online components, the gameplay… If my dream was to be a game developer, then for me working on *FIFA* wasn't even *in* my dreams: I thought it was so out of my reach. The first day I saw my game on the shelf, I cried. Every year we make a game, we make a plaque for those that work on the game – and for '06, I gave mine to my mum. I was incredibly proud of that game.

"I THOUGHT I'VE GOT TO LEARN TO PROGRAM"

The first thing I started doing in games was testing titles for a publisher, but I thought to myself 'in the meantime, I've got to learn to program'. My wife and I started to code together – we came up with this game about a bumblebee piggybank that flies around the garden pollenating flowers that shoot coins at him. He collects these coins to buy hats (he's a fan of hats), and we made it all to be this elaborate top-down anti-shooter, I guess. It was a lot of fun and somehow managed to exist for several years as we worked our way up in the industry even though we never really knew how to code very well! We finished it, and released it for Xbox Indie Games on the 360: *BumblePig*!



BOB ROBERTS

LEAD DESIGNER, MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS





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Reviews



100 ALIEN: ISOLATION

Can Creative Assembly save the Alien franchise from the shadow Colonial Marines cast? **games**™ finds out

THE AVERAGE

Three of the numbers in a ten-point scale are of greater importance than the others: five, seven, and of course, ten. Some publications would fool you into believing that a 7/10 game is average, but that just doesn't make sense to us. **games™** reviews videogames on their entertainment value, and so any title that simply performs to an adequate standard will receive a 5/10. Simple. The elusive ten is reserved for games of incredible, irrefutable quality, but please be aware that a score of ten in no way professes to mean perfection. Perfection is an unattainable goal, and on a ten-point scale nothing should be unattainable. Again, simple. Our reviews are not a checklist of technical features with points knocked off for flaws, neither are they a PR-pressured fluff-fest – we'd never let that happen, and besides you'd smell it a mile off. And finally, the reviews you find within these pages are most certainly not statements of fact, they are the opinions of schooled, knowledgeable videogame journalists, designed to enlighten, inform, and engage. The gospel according to **games™**.













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THE SHEER TERROR OF THE SITUATION COMPLETELY SEIZES THE PLAYER IN THE MOMENT AND REFUSES TO LOOSEN ITS GRIP FOR THE ENSUING DURATION

RIPLEY AND RIDLEY

The amount of fan service packed into *Alien: Isolation* is astounding. It not only pays homage to a number of movies in the series, but the level of detail with which the world of Ridley Scott's original has been replicated is incredible. The analogue technology that surrounds the station perfectly encapsulates the Seventies' era idealism of the future, while the use of Jerry Goldsmith's original music score permeates the world with a sense of dread. There are more references and some huge revelations with moments that hark back to the original film, and it's this perfect replication of that world that helps establish a credible and authentic threat in the Alien itself.





ALIEN AUTOPSY

Alien: Isolation

DETAILS

FORMAT: XBOX ONE
OTHER FORMATS: PC, PLAYSTATION 3, PLAYSTATION 4, XBOX 360
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: CREATIVE ASSEMBLY
PRICE: £46.99
RELEASE: 7 OCTOBER
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

The highest compliment that you can pay Creative Assembly's uncompromising, nerve-plucking and lengthy entry in the *Alien* canon is that even without any prior knowledge of its source material, *Alien: Isolation* is superb.

It doesn't matter whether you can appreciate the care with which the world of Ridley Scott's 1979 original has been replicated. It's almost irrelevant the misfortune that has befallen Ellen Ripley in the past, mother of *Isolation*'s hard-nosed protagonist Amanda. It's beside the point whether you've encountered the banana-headed extraterrestrial before in the movies, spin-offs, comic books and videogames that have steadily diminished the creature's fear factor over the years. That's because the moment when the xenomorph does arrive – initially unfurling from a gloomy ceiling duct and rising to an imposing 9ft in height – the sheer terror of the situation completely seizes the player in the moment and refuses to loosen its grip for the ensuing duration.

The big question that has loomed over the project ever since it was announced is whether or not that terror can be sustained across the entirety of a single-player campaign. The good news is that, outside of a spirited climactic twist, it achieves exactly that. Even before the eponymous Alien emerges from the dark, the sense of foreboding is immeasurable. The derelict ship groans and clangs while its disintegrating husk drifts through the empty vacuum of space, its corridors barely lit by flickering light, and its air-conditioning system ominously rattling.

When it does appear, the claustrophobia that permeates the setting is amplified substantially. You'll cower in lockers, peering through the thin slats while you wait for safe passage. Eventually you'll crawl through

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

INCIDENT: Well, while this isn't a sequel, what it does do right that other *Alien* games have done wrong is strip back the action and focus on the terrifying creature itself.

Left: On normal difficulty, the flame-thrower can make it a bit easier to deter an Alien attack. However, once you've used it, you have signposted your location and the Alien will keep coming back until your fuel is depleted.



Above: The attention to detail with which the design and aesthetic of Ridley Scott's original 1979 movie has been replicated is outstanding. Particularly impressive is the sound design.



Left: Tools become available as you progress through the game. Its metroidvania style means that your door-cutter tool will need upgrading to access rooms across the station's multiple towers.

BETTER THAN

ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES



AS GOOD AS

DEAD SPACE 2

the shadows, studying your motion tracker for any sign of movement, waiting patiently for the monster to move a safe distance away before progressing.

Interestingly, this measured approach to survival is established through a series of more traditional scenarios. Dropped into one of several compact, open environments spread across the space station, other hostile residents will fire on Amanda, which forces a stealth adoption almost immediately. Of course, it turns out that while these gun-toting survivors offer an immediate danger, later in the game they'll also serve as a convenient distraction; a marvellously wicked lure to coax the creature out of the darkness, giving it something to feast on while you swift-foot it out of the vicinity.

Danger is ever-present and fear isn't just derived from the titular beast. Aside from humans and extraterrestrials, malfunctioning androids that take forceful means to keep the facility operational stalk the ship's walkways with implacable red glares. Again, these offer more survivalist trials in preparation for the alpha predator. Get locked into combat and you'll quickly find the AI adapting to your playstyle, catching your arm as you attempt to bludgeon it into a puddle a milky fluid and even luring you into a false sense of security by rolling out a more durable model in the game's final act.

Likewise, the Alien's AI studies your actions and adapts accordingly. It's difficult to quantify how successful this plays out. While we didn't rely too heavily on gadgets during our playthrough, we found that only a couple proved overly useful – the flare and noisemaker – and the xenomorph continued to be fooled in each instance where we used them. However, on other occasions, it did display a canny awareness of our thought process – for example, waiting inside a vent above a door we wanted to pass – and we quickly realised that there was not one strategy guaranteed for success.

Not that it particularly matters. There's no questioning that the Alien is a deadly adversary, and one that will repeatedly get the better of you in a variety of grisly death animations. Aside from a few moments of cheap, inescapable bad luck (such as the terrifying sight of it charging towards us inside an air vent), your demise is often destined due to your mistakes. Firing a gun, sprinting through the station or leaving your torch running too long can all make you susceptible to a swift attack. It's a punishing but gratifying system, albeit one that can occasionally seem uncomfortable indulging itself too deeply.

FAQs

Q. IS IT SCARY?
Absolutely. It's not just the Alien that provides the scares, but faulty androids doing their very best to try and kill you at every available opportunity.

Q. HOW LONG IS IT?
It can take up to 20 hours, depending on how quickly you walk through it and how many times you die. Pretty substantial, given the subject matter.

Q. IS IT CANON?
That much isn't too clear. There's some nods to a variety of movies in the franchise, but given one revelation, we doubt Fox will consider it lore.



Below: Studying your motion tracker is key to surviving through *Isolation*. However, leave it open for too long and the Alien will hear it and will work out your location.



Once you're handed the flame-thrower, things become much easier. A quick jet of fire is enough to deter an attack and ammo isn't scarce enough that you can't rely on it for long stretches. Other weapons are less effectual, but serve a purpose. Craftable items include flashbangs, EMP mines, Molotov cocktails and noisemakers, mostly used for a distraction aid, but again, you'll rarely find yourself without enough materials to at least craft a couple in a pinch. Unless you're particularly sociopathic when it comes to engaging other survivors, our handgun was well stocked throughout.



Right: Androids aren't easy to take down. The best course of action is to flambé them with the flame-thrower, or use the stun baton to send them convulsing before landing a few blows with your wrench.

ISOLATION REAFFIRMS THAT THE XENOMORPH IS THE ULTIMATE HORROR ICON, BOTH TERRIFYING AND AWESOME

Below: There's nothing more ominous than a flaming android slowing walking towards you with deadly intention.



TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

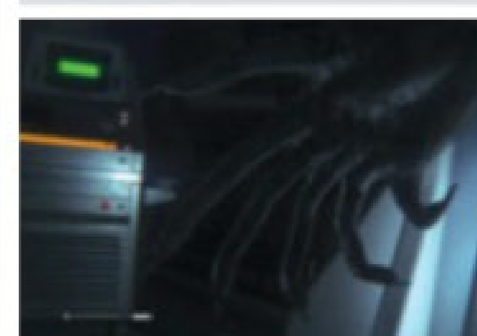
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

20 MINS



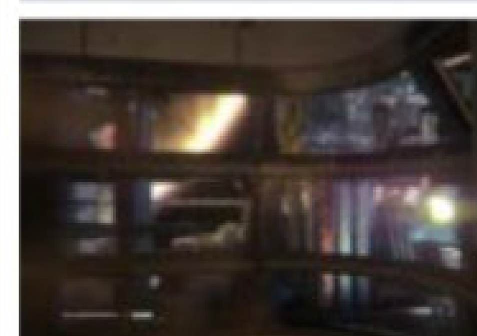
You're alone on the space station Sevastopol, separated from your team, while everything around you seems to clatter and ache as if it's about to tear itself apart.

3 HOURS



Your first encounter with the Alien itself. If you've just spent the past 20 minutes killing all the humans in the previous area, that might have been a mistake.

20 HOURS



After a rush denouement, you can finally breathe again as you've managed to outfox the extraterrestrial and survive the whole tense ordeal. Until next time?

CRAFTY DEVIL

It's not just a flashlight and your wits you have to rely on to survive your time on the space station while being hunted by the Alien. You'll discover blueprints throughout the game that enable you to craft scrap resources you discover into useful tools. Each of these serve specific functions against different adversaries. For example, the EMP grenade can temporarily stun androids, while flashbangs can be used to blind human enemies and make a quick exit. The noisemaker and flare can be used to lure the Alien out of its hiding place, while the Molotov cocktail can be used as an offensive measure in a last resort. However, whether you want to risk exposure by using any of the above is up to you.

This comes down to playstyle to some degree, whether you'd rather remain silent or risk exposure. Those looking for a tougher challenge will be served better playing on Hard, where resources are stripped back and the AI cranked up a notch in difficulty. Yet, despite what sounds like a few compromises for accessibility, there's a hefty challenge laid across the 18-or-so hours of campaign that will keep the heart pounding.

Whether or not you're actually frightened of the Alien itself, Creative Assembly has masterfully structured its campaign, carefully placing checkpoints just far enough apart where the fear of the Alien isn't just founded in the inevitable jump-scare, but also in how much progress you'll lose.

The objectives that push players around the station boil down to rudimentary tasks, mostly involving rebooting offline systems using a series of analogue puzzles. Many of these are completed on computer terminals, which is where the majority of the game's story takes place.

While the plot involves Amanda searching the Sevastopol space station for the black box recorder of her mother's missing ship, Nostromo – offering insight into the gap between the original film and its first sequel – the back-story to the station's descent into chaos plays out through the sickly green hue of a computer monitor. Told through email exchanges and audio recordings, details reveal how bureaucracy drove rifts between employees, while economic downturn caused ruinous fortune to the lives aboard.

Elsewhere, fans of Ridley's film will relish the Nostromo logs voiced by the film's actors. These are found concealed across the multiple towers of the station, and the metroidvania structure encourages you to go back with the right tool to explore the rooms behind every sealed door. While the geography of the station is relatively intuitive, there's more that could have been done to make the map clearer. It's also curious that viewing the map screen pauses the action. Considering that the game constructs so much of its design around tension, it's a small quibble that is at odds with the conceit.

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

MOVE: While it's obvious why Creative Assembly has limited Amanda Ripley's moveset, a quick-turn feature would've been a welcome addition and would no doubt provide a few additional scares.

Ultimately, Creative Assembly has delivered on its promise of an unforgiving thriller that refuses to pull its punches. *Isolation* reaffirms the Alien as the ultimate horror icon, both terrifying and awesome; trapping you within its cage proves to be the shot in the arm the franchise needed. Bold, unrelenting and very scary, *Alien: Isolation* is a triumph in every department. No prior knowledge is necessary. Just prepare yourself for the most terrifying game of the year.

VERDICT 9/10

ALL OTHER PRIORITIES RESCINDED

CONSOLE GAMERS HAVE A NEW MMO HOME

Destiny

We don't know what *Destiny* is. It isn't an MMO, though it takes a lot of cues from the genre, sometimes to its detriment, sometimes to its advantage. But it's not just an FPS or an RPG, either. It's some weird amalgamation of genres whose final form is something of a Frankenstein's monster. But it's powerful, and by God does it look good: Destiny is proof that Bungie wasn't just lucky with Halo – it's an incredible developer, but perhaps its partnership with Activision hasn't been for the best.

We should clarify that Destiny doesn't feel finished. You can see the gaps where later DLC is going to be dropped in; each playable class only has two selectable subclasses (for now), yet there are three slots in the inventory. Each planet only has one playable area – so Venus, Mars, the Moon and Earth create four hub areas with labyrinthine missions coming out of each of them. There's probably about as much content there as you'd find in a Halo game, level-wise, but the presentation of it might leave you feeling a little short-changed.

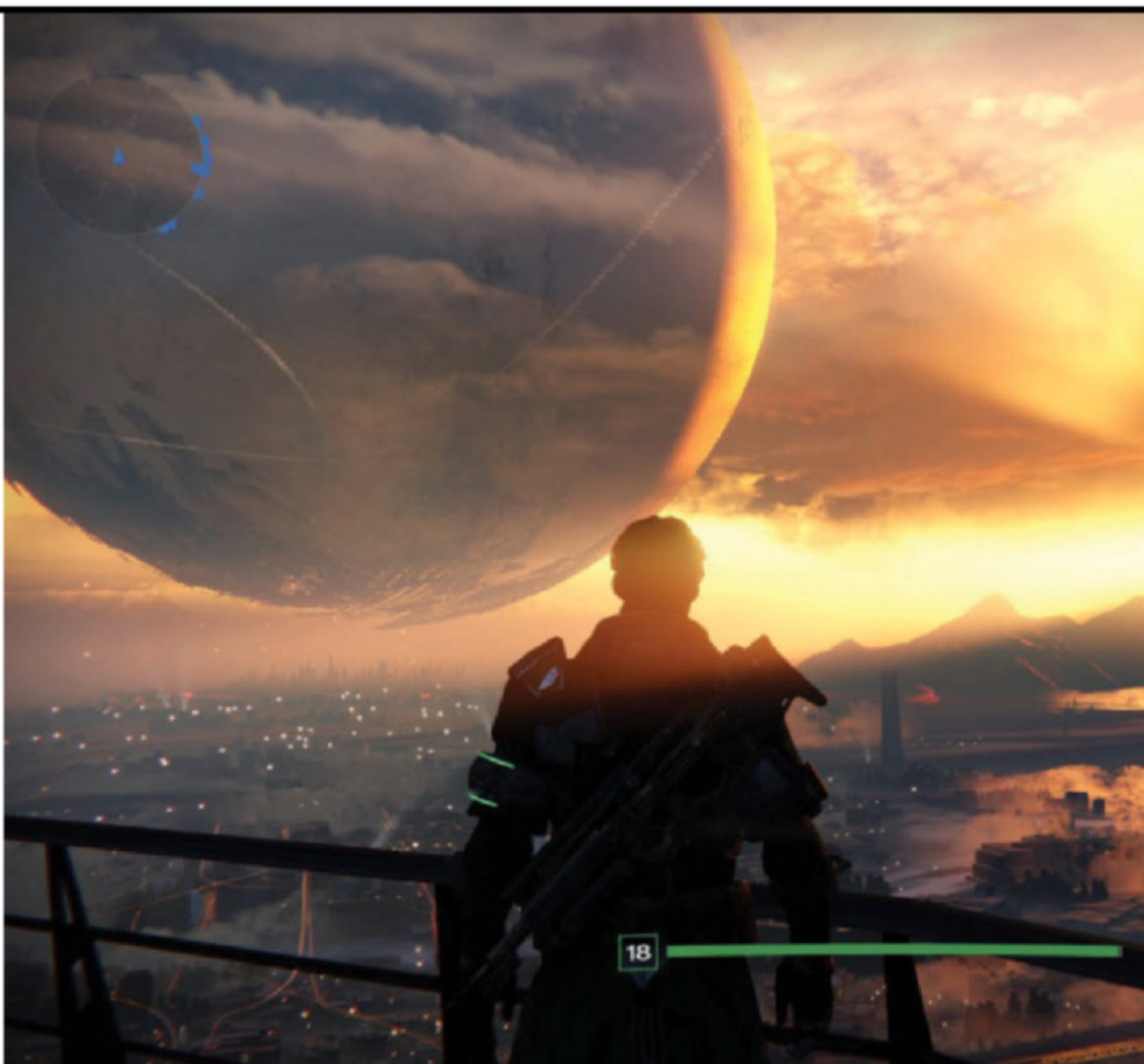
How much extra content will be added for free, and how much will be premium, remains to be seen, but if Activision chooses to implement in-app purchases or offer *everything* as DLC, we foresee the community rebelling somewhat.

That's one of *Destiny*'s strongest assets – the community – and where the elements borrowed from the MMO really come into their own. While the social hub – The Tower – can feel devoid of personality, when you launch into a mission with a complete Fireteam (up to three Guardians), a sense of camaraderie kicks in, even if you're playing with randoms: you all want to succeed, you all want to grind the bosses for as much loot as you can, you all stick together.

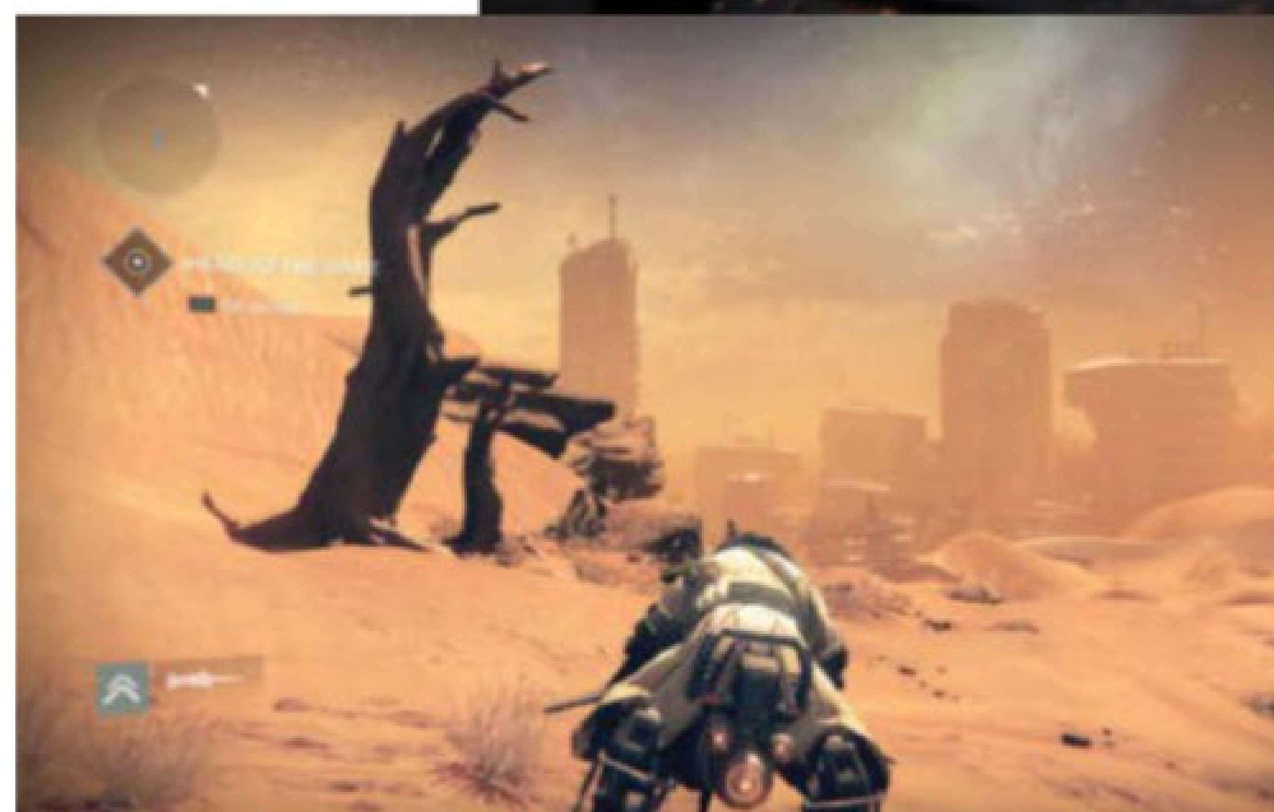
Bungie is a master at creating compelling AI, and the studio knew *Destiny* would rely on it – heavily – and the intimate firefights you're

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED: PS4
OTHER FORMATS: PS3, Xbox 360, Xbox One
ORIGIN: USA
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Bungie
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE: 2-12



Below: *Halo* comparisons are hard not to make, but when you happen upon the cosmic vistas, you can't help but be in awe of the game's gargantuan scale





FAQs

Q. WILL IT LIVE UP TO THE HYPE?
You've got a $500 million budget behind you and took over Times Square… it may not live up the hype, but it's still great.

Q. DOES IT GET BORING?
If you're used to CoD's PvP and Borderland's single-player, then yes. But you should be thinking more along MMO lines in terms of mission structure.

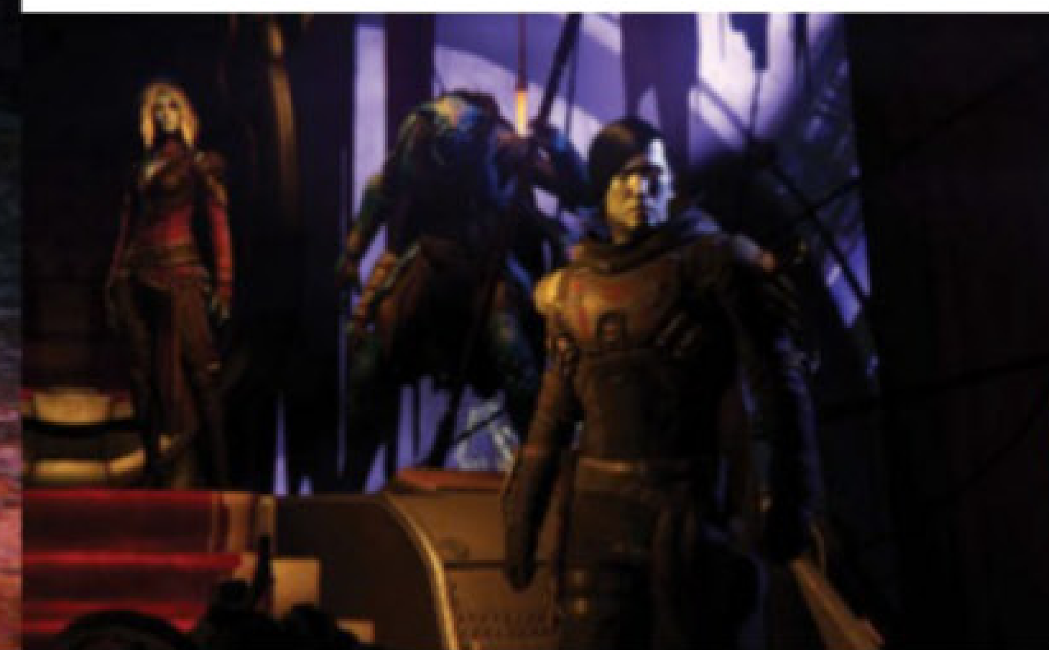
Q. HOW DOES PETER DINKLAGE FARE?
His acting as the player's Ghost has garnered criticism, but his voice is perfectly detached and wry.



IT'S THE LEVELLING CONCEIT POST-GAME THAT REALLY HIGHLIGHTS DESTINY AS SOMETHING SPECIAL







Left: Every mission: go somewhere, deploy your Ghost, Ghost messes up hacking something, enemies appear, kill them, Ghost succeeds. It makes sense, but some players will find it grating.

BETTER THAN — DEFIANCE



WORSE THAN — HALO: REACH

pressured into by the monolithic bosses that spawn at the end of every mission.

Some are unique (and they're by far the most fun to take out), while other bosses are super-powered versions of the grunts you'll encounter en route. Each race acts differently, too: the first you encounter, the Fallen, are basically a race of mechanical Jackals from *Halo* – jittery and equipped with snipers, they're probably the hardest enemies in the game.

The encounters in the story get weirdly easier, too: the next race, the Hive, are bombardiers, and can safely be destroyed from distance. The Vex, mechanical teleporters from Venus, are erratic and shielded, but have a huge weak point in their thorax. The final race (again, for now) are the Cabal; hulking militarised humanoids that look like *Halo*'s Brutes, but think more strategically.

It also helps that absolutely everything looks stunning; from the galactic vistas to the broken down paradises of humanity's golden age, everything has had a ludicrous amount of attention put into it.

The game doesn't start in earnest until you've sunk about eight hours into it. The story is serviceable and well-presented, and will see you through the initial slog, but it's the levelling conceit post-game that really highlights *Destiny* as something special. From level 20 onwards, you have to level by equipping Legendary, Rare or Exotic gear – all of which, oddly, is *mega* rare.

Weekly or Daily Strikes offer the best chances of acquiring the rare loot, and PvP drops are recommended, too. Each mode will also reward you with Marks (a form of currency that can be exchanged for uber-rare items) or potentially drop Coins or Motes – both of which can be traded in at specific locations for the most impressive gear.

Post-level 20, more missions are unlocked and more modifiers are added to the missions: these basically act as the *Halo* skulls – some amplifying enemies' physical damage, some making enemies more aggressive, some magnifying all fire damage.

These are game changers, and make the whole mission structure (which in the pre-game seems dull) far more interesting. You can tell the AI was built to be modified by these perks, and coming up against a boss at level 28 (the hardest currently available) really shows the depth and nuance required to get the most out of the current *Destiny* experience.

Each class has a distinctly different play-style, too: we started as the ranged-suited Warlock, and found great success with it, but after we accidentally unlocked some Hunter Legendary gear (we're sure Bungie trolls players with 'not-your-class' rare drops), we switched over to the quicker, more melee-focused class. It's amazing how different each of the styles feels straight away – it's a credit to Bungie and the balancing team that's been working on *Destiny* for over seven years.

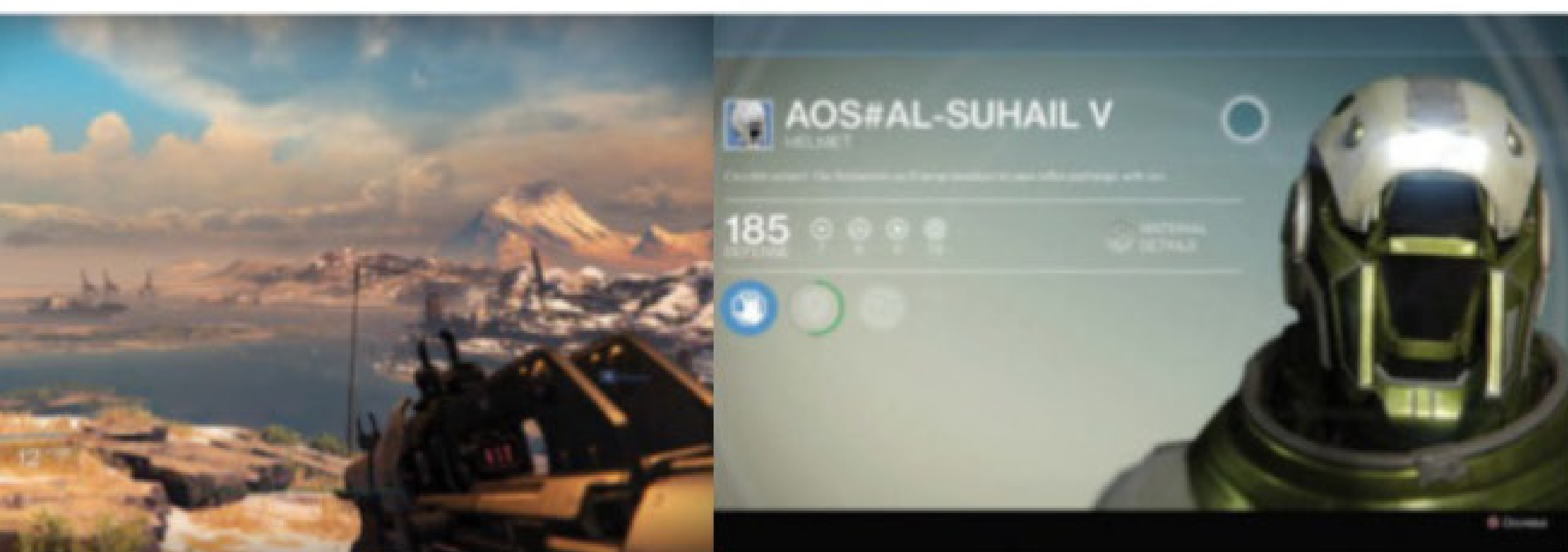
We ought to end this review with the caveat that – like any kind of MMO – *Destiny* is an unfinished product, for better or worse. The game has a ten-year life cycle, according to Bungie, and when you consider how different *World of Warcraft* was a year down the line to its launch, you have to think about what Destiny has yet to offer. There are already two DLC packs in the works, and as the classes continue to expand and the items continue to update, we think *Destiny* is likely to become the go-to console party game. Nothing like this with this kind of budget has been done on console before, and we have to respect Bungie – and Activision – for that. As of right now it lacks the infrastructure and breadth of content to maintain long-term interest, so the updates and expansions will need to arrive soon.

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

MMORPGFPS: *Destiny* has practically invented a genre, and has done it well. Nothing like this, on the same scale, has been done before, so there are bound to be teething problems, but *Destiny* deals with them impeccably.

Left: Socially you can only dance, point, sit and wave at the moment. But dancing to celebrate your victories will never, ever get old. **Below:** Loot hunting is one of the most satisfying parts of *Destiny* – this helmet took us two hours to find, and was outdated a few levels later. But that's *fun*, right?



MOTLEY CRUCIBLE

The PvP in *Destiny* feels – surprisingly – like *Halo*'s, but slower, more considered. Each class's ability to double-jump/hover really comes into its own in this mode, and the verticality of all the maps ensures dynamic gameplay every time. The loading times are pretty jarring, and can take away urgency, but the presentation of each mode is amazing, and despite there only being four standard match types (with different modes rolled in by weekly events). Control makes you work as a 6v6 team, and think tactically, Strike is the vanilla 6v6 death match, Rumble is the 'every-Guardian-for-themselves' mode and the final Skirmish option is a more intimate 3v3 where you can revive fallen comrades – by far our favourite.

VERDICT 8/10

INNOVATIVE, BEAUTIFUL, ADDICTIVE, BUT INCOMPLETE

PAPER-THIN WALLS ON STRONG FOUNDATIONS

The Sims 4

Well, Maxis has certainly had a bit of a thrashing, hasn't it? Despite the underlying improvements that came with *SimCity*, the internet had spoken: it did *not* like the reboot. Not to dwell too much, but here it is in a nutshell: Maxis made design decisions the internet did not like, Maxis said it was impossible to change these elements, the internet proved it wrong. And when you're on the internet's naughty step, often there's little you can do to free yourself from its disdain. Which has, unsurprisingly, affected *The Sims 4*.

See, this iteration of the popular life simulator is perhaps the safest yet, as though Maxis is wary of upsetting the boat and inadvertently capsizing the whole operation. It begins – as do so many *Sims* games – with Create-a-Sim, the glitzy storefront upon which *The Sims 4* is supposed to rely on. There's no faulting it, either; this is by far the easiest to use and most tactile Create-a-Sim yet. But here's the first opportunity for diehard fans to grumble: as you might expect, simplicity also bears restriction. Where other *Sims* games allowed for in-depth, intricate control over every aspect of your creation's physique through sliders upon sliders, the most recent is a little more subtle about it.

In *The Sims 4*, you'll use your mouse to tweak and tug, push and pull, slimify and enfatten. Want a thinner nose? Highlight the area, slowly drag the cursor and you're done. It might not sound easier than dragging a slider from one side of the bar to another, but it's actually keenly intuitive – it is clever GUI design at its utmost and perhaps the best Create-a-Sim yet, at least in ease of use. But yes, it *is* restrictive. To ensure each and every Sim fits into a particular remit of socially-conceived beauty, the boundaries that are in place here will feel particularly close for anyone experienced with the franchise. It's a very fine line between mechanical improvements (the system *is* better, *is* more fun, *is* easier to use) versus that contradictory negativity that comes with simplicity.

You'd probably worry that building a home suffered similar fate, but in truth this particular area remains as strong as always. A heap of new options embolden the mode, while sleek UI design means you're never stuck for ideas on what to add next. It's perhaps not as intuitive as Create-a-Sim – especially thanks to often inexplicable reasons for parts not working – but does the job amicably. The wide range of options means you'll be able to build every range

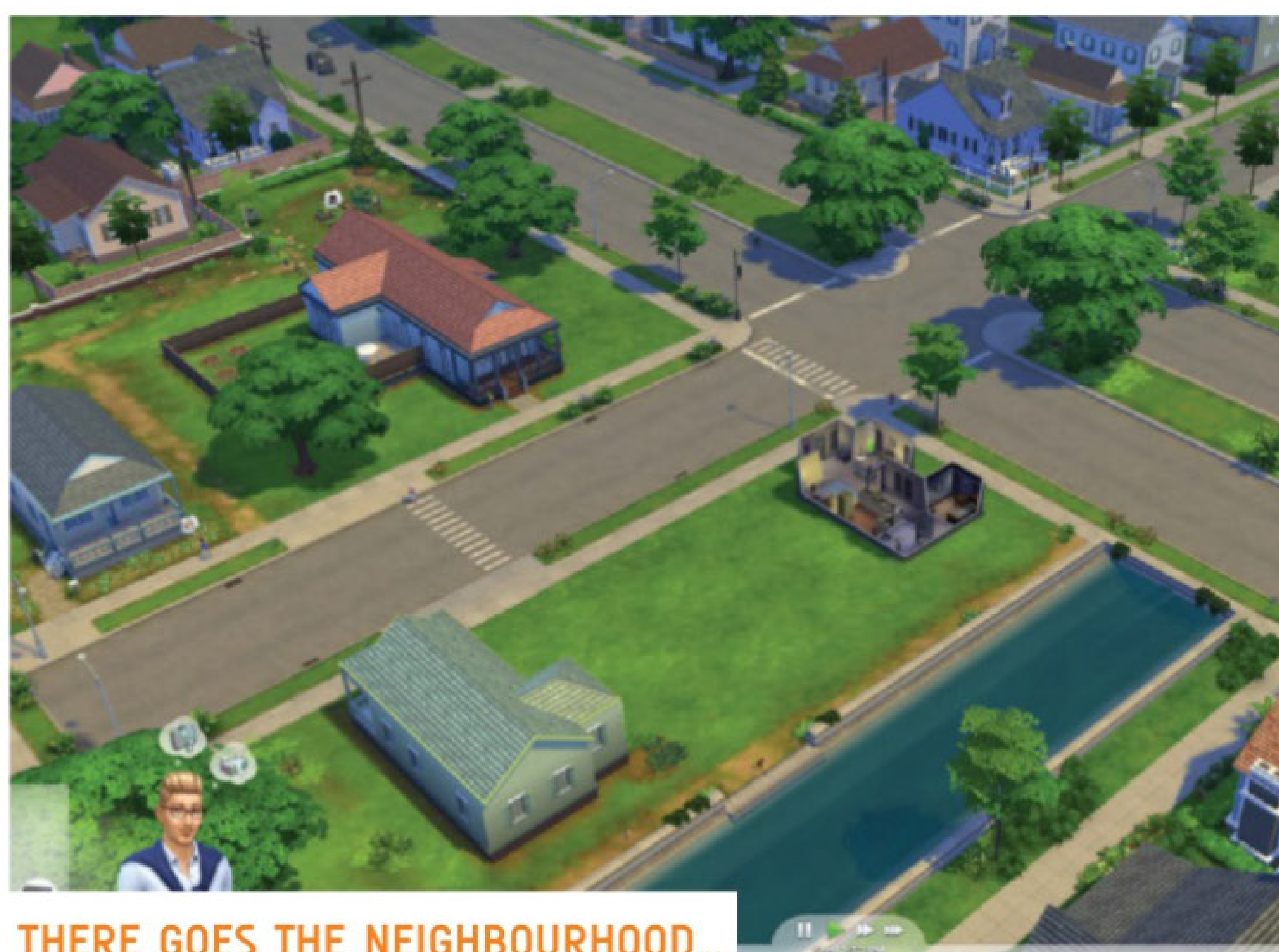
DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: EA
DEVELOPER: Maxis
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
MINIMUM SPEC: 1.8 GHz dual core CPU, 2GB RAM, 10GB HDD space, 128MB GPU
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes





Above: Customising initial household relationships is still awkward. You can either be a roommate, sibling or spouse – nothing in between. Right: The skills system includes everything from cooking and guitar to charisma and even gaming. It creates a much broader set of ways of playing and goals to work towards, even outside of your own career.



THERE GOES THE NEIGHBOURHOOD...

It's a sort of weird grey area with *The Sims 4*. Neighbourhoods do exist, at least in a fashion that – during play – does feel like The Sims 3's open world, but it's presented in such an *old* method. The menu used to 'manage' your households is very reminiscent of the original game, but here others will pass your house while exercising, cars will fly by at night and – most importantly – you can head off to other locations in the world, you'll just need to load the location first. It's presents itself in an awkward way, when what The Sims 4 should be doing is improving upon its predecessor's method of an open world neighbourhood. It doesn't seem like the kind of problem that can be fixed with a patch, either.



BETTER THAN — HARVEST MOON: A NEW BEGINNING



JUST LIKE — THE SIMS 3

FAQs

Q. SO WORSE THAN SIMS 3?
In many ways it's better, but the missing features and step backwards in terms of neighbourhoods is a huge letdown.

Q. WHAT'S MISSING?
Most famously it's the swimming pools and toddlers. The latter is more important than the former, of course, but it's a shame all the same.

Q. EXPANSION PACKS THEN?
Most likely. The franchise has a history of it but you can bet the internet will be up in arms if EA tries to charge for these two particular features.

of structure, from grand, ornate mansions to trailer park homes or those gorgeous flat-pack, glass-only houses from Germany. It's not perfect, mind. Roofs are manual additions and while that opens up greater depth and variety, they don't fit in *The Sims 4* 'mold' – it's there because it needs to be but with only four types of roof it can be a pain to slot everything in neatly, especially if you want to use angled walls. Just look at the number of Maxis-made homes that feature roof-less buildings; as with *SimCity*, it's a blinkered American view of the world that forgets the true finesse and artistry of architecture. Then there's object placement that, once again, remains grid-based and restrictive. Angles are harsh (and awkward to use) and though there's a little more flexibility within those grids as to where you can place objects, it still feels like we're playing *The Sims 3*. It's a franchise 14 years old, it's about time the option to place a sofa at a 37 degree angle was made possible. It's sort of an understandable dilemma, though; the grid-based system helps your Sims navigate their worlds and interact with the objects in it, but in spite of general improvements they're no smarter now – not *really* – than they were over a decade ago. Except now they can multitask.

CONNECTED
EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

WHAT'S YOURS IS MINE: It's possible to upload your creations to the internet and have people download them and try them for themselves; of course, as a game all about personal creative expression, how useful this is will remain to be seen.

Now you're free to play games and poop, chat and exercise, with many activities improving the condition of your Sims' general happiness just by being combined with another task. Still, the same old frustrations can arise while you demand actions of your Sim for them only to ignore all that and instead stand around chatting or – worse still – doing completely nothing at all. Pathfinding and AI has not really advanced to a standard we should all expect, but what has improved are the Sims themselves.

Aspirations and personality traits truly customise the way they might react to the world around them, but also with the people they meet. It makes for characters that feel real – more so than any other *Sims* game. Your Sims' needs better tailor the decisions you might make for them, easing the reins of even the most stalwart of controlling players – more so than even in *The Sims 3*. A Sim's emotions correlate with the actions they can complete – a particular favourite being the ability to 'have an angry poo'. This leads to fascinating, entertaining situations, but if the cost is a number of missing features it doesn't always feel worth it.

IT'S A FRANCHISE 14 YEARS OLD, IT'S ABOUT TIME THE OPTION TO PLACE A SOFA AT A 37 DEGREE ANGLE WAS MADE POSSIBLE

The franchise has always been better when each game is viewed as a complete whole, but it's hard to ignore what has come before. Neighbourhoods are bizarrely restricted to the static menu screens a la the original Sims, swimming pools are gone, and entire career paths are missing where more audacious ones take their place. In many ways *The Sims 4* is a beginning, its core foundation of functions playing their parts beautifully. But in others it feels like a step back, like a set of systems designed around future expansion in mind and not providing the necessary wealth of options from the start. Though *The Sims 4* does so much to widen its berth, diehard fans will likely be looking to moor up somewhere else entirely.



Above: Particular moods and emotions can affect your overall happiness – even if your other needs are maxed out. Left: The template system is quite a handy way of getting preset designs for particular rooms, but can't be applied automatically, making it a quick option but not necessarily a better one.

VERDICT 7/10
IMPROVED, UPGRADED; REMOVED, DOWNGRADED



ORCS MUST DIE

Middle-earth: Shadow of Mordor

There are several preconceptions that have been hung around *Middle-earth: Shadow Of Mordor*'s neck. Accusations of laziness in how its central mechanics have seemingly been cherry-picked from the genre's strongest offerings; the unfavourable association that licensed products have with generally poor software; and then there's the fact that games based on *The Lord Of The Rings* franchise have been almost universally average. Imagine our surprise, then, when we found *Shadow Of Mordor* to not only dispel such qualms but proves to be finely-tuned action adventure title with plenty of ideas of its own.

The finest of which is the Nemesis system. Set across the barren planes of Mordor is an Orc hierarchy that changes depending on your interactions within the world. It's a hugely immersive mechanic, with the Uruks you encounter shaped by your previous interactions, and each possessing their own unique traits and behaviour quirks. After several unpleasant encounters with Borg Evil Eye (who killed us once and fled from battle twice), his final (and unfortunate) skirmish with our hero Talion began with him strutting onto the battlefield, his head wrapped in cloth and string thanks to too many nasty lacerations from our previous dust-ups.

You do end up forming small, meaningful relationships with the enemies you encounter, spurring grudge matches and vengeance missions. In fact, much of our first ten hours playing the game were spent scouring the land for those that previously wronged us, and plenty more joined the hit list with each subsequent death at the hands of previously anonymous Orcs.

This does tie into the central narrative, with hero Talion witnessing his family slain at the blade of the Black Hand of Sauron – a high-up lieutenant that yields power over his armies – and sets out on a mission of bloody revenge. Getting to the Black Hand involves passing through his Warchiefs and it's up to you whether to use the Nemesis system to create advantages in completing that mission. For example, Captains can be interrogated for information on a Warchief's personal bodyguards, and the hunting down of those bodyguards before fighting the Warchief himself will present a huge advantage. And other options become available as you progress and gain further

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation 4
ORIGIN: US
ORIGIN: PC, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Xbox One
PUBLISHER: Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Monolith Productions
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

A SLICK COMBINATION OF OFFENSIVE MOVES CAN TURN A GARRISON OF ORCS INTO MINCEMEAT

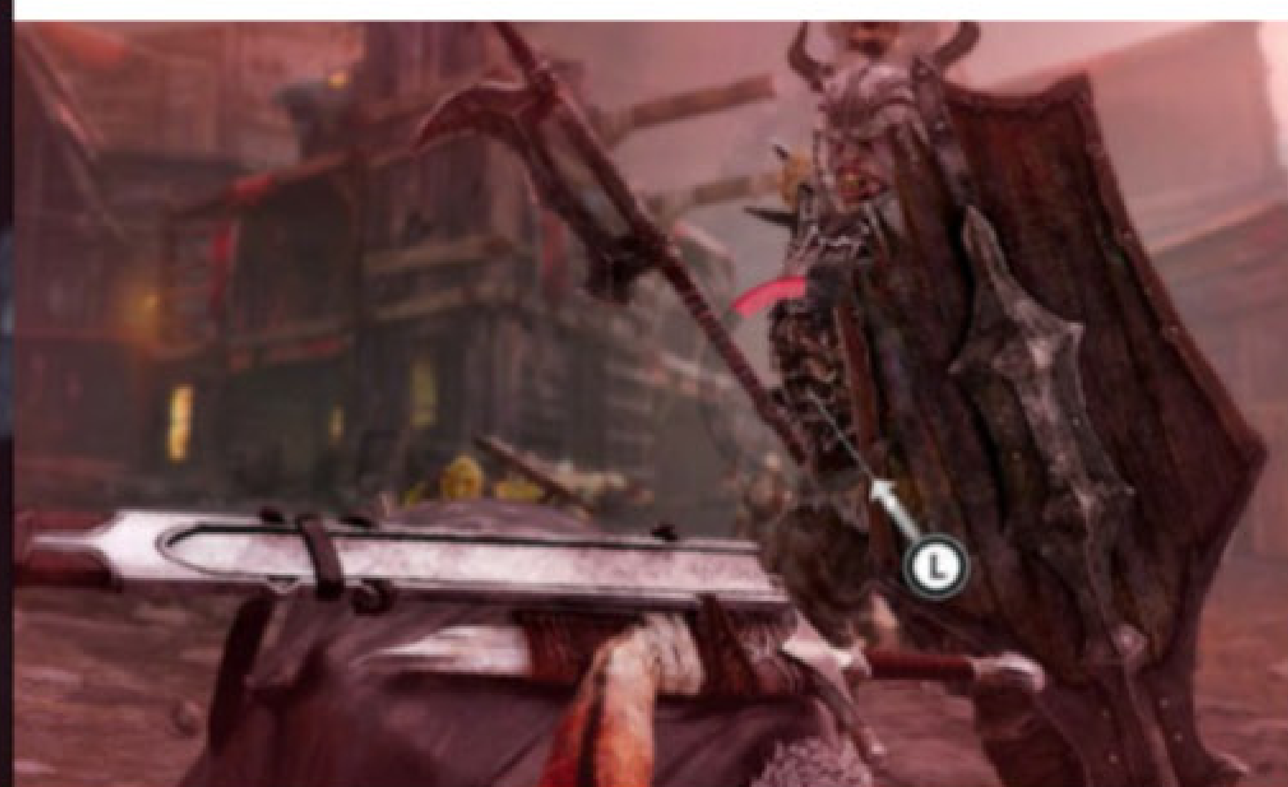
FAQs

Q. BAGGINS?
Nope, none of those guys appear. The game is set completely behind the Black Gate of Mordor. However, a few familiar faces appear.

Q. IS IT GORY?
Very much so. We're not sure whether it needed to be quite so graphic but certainly Monolith have indulged the darker side of Tolkien.

Q. HOW BIG IS IT?
It isn't the biggest open-world setting we've explored but it's suitable enough for the adventure at hand.





Left: Enter the Wraith world and you can slow down time with the Focus meter. Also, your bow has limited ammunition and can be recharged by draining enemies and animals around the environment.







Right: Orcs in the hierarchy will have their own missions and if they succeed without interruption they'll rank up.

Below: Stringing together a combo of seven successive hits unlocks an instant execution kill. Prepare to spill some Orc blood.

abilities that enable you to manipulate the Orc infrastructure by recruiting enemies to your side. The success of the system is as much down to the personality as it is the gameplay's gripping, gratifying loop. The hours of dialogue and the huge diversity in characters is a magnificent achievement and elevates *Shadow of Mordor*'s combat above its hack-and-slash trappings.

Of course, it's helped in that department by lifting one of the best melee systems in the business, using Rocksteady's *Arkham* series as a template for its action. It serves Monolith's mature vision on the brand well, with punchy, flowing combat responsive and visceral; a slick combination of offensive moves and counters can turn a garrison of blood-hungry Orcs into mincemeat in minutes.

The intuitive moveset is bolstered by Wraith abilities. Familiarity once again strikes as the view in the Wraith world bears uncanny similarities to similar Detective modes in other games, however the range of enhancements to combat offer more critical and wider attacks. Also, ranged weaponry is entirely a Wraith trait, which, while slightly odd, does enable the bow to be used as a teleportation device as well as a weapon. But most impressive is the ability to dominate opponents, which enables players to enter the minds of Orcs (and the less-evolved beasts that lurk past the Black Gate), interrogate them and set them against their own masters.

This is given some convenient context within Tolkien's own established lore, with the Wraith himself revealed to be Celebrimbor, the Elf who forged the Rings of Power. Celebrimbor and Talion set out to discover why they were destined to unite and along the way run into some familiar characters, including a welcome cameo from Gollum. That being said, tonally the script is at little at odds with its source, trying to capture the tone of the movies but occasionally descending into much darker and morbid territory – one skit involves an Orc looking for a sharper blade to mutilate a victim.

For the most part the character work and narrative offer some enjoyable beats, but the world itself is much less engaging. Mordor, as you may remember it, was an ashen wasteland, with a imposing mountain spewing magma while a flaming eye watched over its denizens. With *Shadow of Mordor* set before the events of *The Lords Of The Rings* and just after *The Hobbit*, such iconography doesn't exist and Mordor itself is much healthier. Almost everything has been left to the developer's artistic interpretation and it disappoints: a bland collection of toppled structures and makeshift Orc camps. As you start to spread outwards and unlock more of the map, there's not much to distinguish one district from the other.

It's disappointing that *Shadow of Mordor* couldn't match the originality of its superb Nemesis system with a more engaging world, but the characters which populate it are more than enough to spur you through the campaign. *Shadow of Mordor* might owe something of a debt to numerous games that have come before it, but by adding its own flavour to the mixture the result is a surprisingly expansive and hearty experience that is more compelling than plenty that have come before it. A hugely entertaining, tongue-in-cheek and fulsome experience, it's a worthy expedition whether you're a *Rings* fan or not.

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

DO YOU KNOW WHAT NEMESIS MEANS? The Nemesis system turns otherwise bland goons into an army of distinctive characters. It's one of the most fun and inventive mechanics we've seen in a while.

RUNE SCOPE

XP and upgrades exist in some form in *Shadow Of Mordor*. When you kill a Chief, they drop Runes, and based on the method by which they were killed these can be used to buff your sword, dagger or bow. These include rewards such as replenishing health after a headshot with a bow, or dealing extra damage when your health drops below 25 percent. Also, XP can be acquired by completing missions across the map and can be spent on unlocking extra Rune slots and improving basic traits such as health or focus. Finally, you're also rewarded tokens for successfully completing missions, which can be spent on new abilities.

BETTER THAN: THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE THIRD AGE



WORSE THAN: BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY

VERDICT 8/10
BRUTAL, INNOVATIVE AND A HUGE AMOUNT OF FUN

GOLDEN GOAL

FIFA 15

It's frightening how lifelike this is. As has become standard practice for EA Sports releases, realism is at the forefront of everything in this year's *FIFA*, and permeating every game mode from simple skill games to the typically excellent Career mode is a brilliant sheen that, arguably, far surpasses any other sports game ever released.

This is a faithful, near-uncanny match day presentation, with all of the bells and whistles that you'd expect to see during genuine football coverage. EA has never scrimped on its attempts to achieve broadcast-level standards, and yet it has somehow reached an entirely different level in *FIFA 15*. All of the Premier League branding has been licensed, adding neatly to the veneer, and commentary through-lines are second-to-none, with the game's resident pundits offering extended insight into most teams and even referencing their real-life form and transfers.

Although arguably superficial, these inclusions have very much become a key facet of the *FIFA* experience. Its realism is what has always separated EA's franchise from Konami's *PES*, although in the past this has often done little to offset gameplay problems. This year it serves to augment the best gameplay that the franchise has ever offered.

There's more fluidity and responsiveness in every move you make on the pitch, with players reacting realistically to physical battles and adjusting their pace in a more dynamic way when trying to knock the ball round an opposing player. There's still the problem that *FIFA* has endured for years, wherein players with a lot of pace are still more useful than anyone else on the pitch, but even so the flow of real football is easily achievable. This is helped by the most advanced AI that *FIFA* has ever enjoyed, with players jostling each other, tugging over excitedly on shirts when trying to close ground on a rampant striker and always fighting for space in the final third. There's more feeling to each player, and they *finally* behave more or less like real footballers, neatly demonstrating EA's knowledge of the beautiful game.

Of course, it's not without its wobbles, especially in the physics department. We have to say that we've seen far less in the way of slapstick tumbles and weird ragdoll malfunctions than in *FIFA 14*, although that's not to say that these problems don't occur at all – after all, it wouldn't be *FIFA* if your two

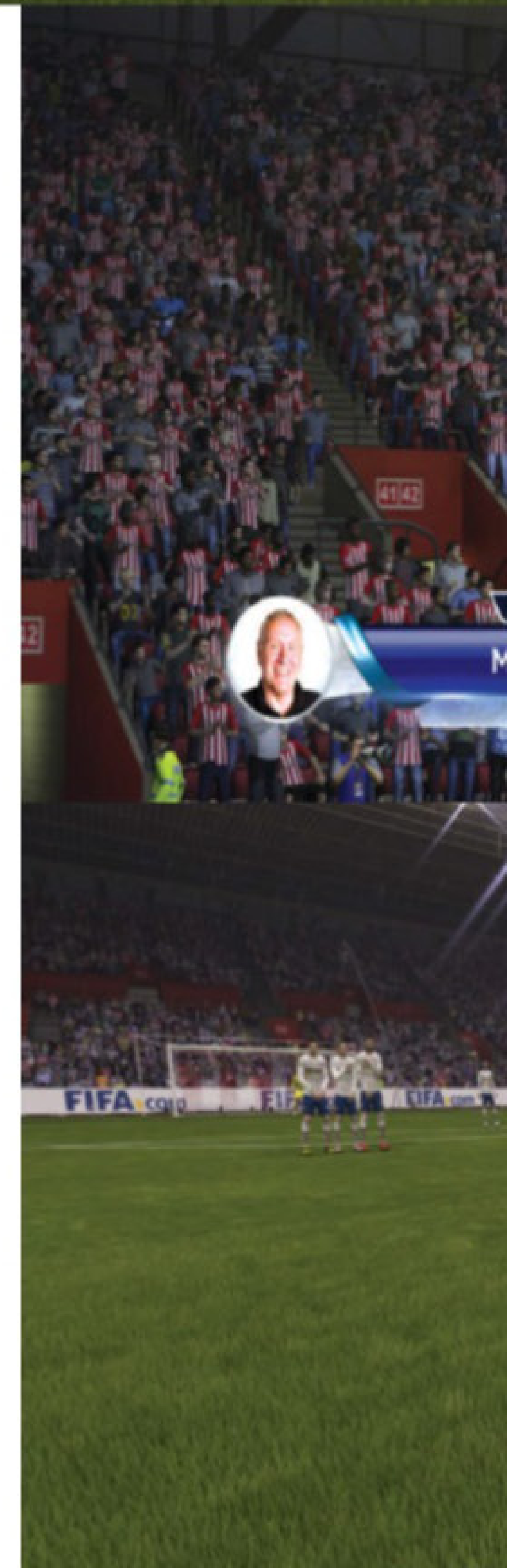
DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation 4
OTHER FORMATS: Xbox One, PC, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Vita, 3DS, Wii, Android, iOS
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: EA Sports
DEVELOPER: EA Canada
PRICE: £59.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-4 (2-22 online)
ONLINE REVIEWED: No



Above: Goalkeepers aren't quite as smart as EA has made out, however new dynamic animations add to the game's realism. **Right:** This is indicative of the quality of presentation at work in *FIFA 15*, with authentic Premier League branding running along the bottom of this screenshot.





THEATRE OF DREAMS

It has been well publicised that this year EA has gone through the painstaking task of accurately recreating every single Premier League stadium in-game, as well as the usual crowd of famous stadiums from around the world. That's over 20 unique football grounds, each represented here in stunning detail, to the point that you'd be forgiven for thinking you were watching TV coverage at times. Knowingly so, EA has highlighted its good work by throwing a superfluous helicopter shot of each ground at you before the start of every game. Yeah, because we really wanted to see an aerial shot of Burnley...



BETTER THAN
PES 2014

AS GOOD AS
PES 6

FAQs

Q. LOTS OF TEAMS?
As usual there are loads of teams, and nearly every corner of the globe has been represented, in some cases with more than one league.

Q. HOW IS THE GRASS?
Good question. It's as if every single blade of grass on the pitch has been looked after, with slide tackles and weather affecting the run of the turf dynamically.

Q. IS IT WORTH THE MONEY?
Even if you own *FIFA 14*, this year's game adds so much to both gameplay and presentation that it's definitely worth a look.

centre halves didn't clatter into each other and create a goal-scoring opportunity every once in a while.

The philosophy of realism and control also extends to more tactile aspects of the game. Now, shooting and through balls are completely in the hands of the player. Shooting has always been fairly aided in the past, but in *FIFA 15* a keen eye for accuracy is essential, as near enough 100 per cent of the shot is you. Power, direction, and swerve – everything is adaptable.

What's even more noticeable now is how the speed and direction that the player is running in drastically affects their connection with the ball. By diving into the Instant Replay function you can easily identify authentic spin and dip when it has been applied to the ball – it looks absolutely amazing in slow motion and demonstrates the care that has been taken to ensure the football itself acts how it's meant to. The yearly tweaks to gameplay always attempt to iron out a few small creases, but this year's iteration feels more like a proper overhaul, like someone has gotten right in there and given it a good scrub. It's more polished, it's more fun and, dare we say it, a little more *PES*. Konami's gameplay is still held in high regard due to its emphasis on precision and control, but with *FIFA 15* EA may have already won the race, a few weeks before we see *Pro Evo* return for another crack of the whip.

WORLDWIDE
TAKING GAMING ONLINE

GOLD DIGGER – *FIFA*'s online suite is generally excellent, with Ultimate Team the jewel in the crown. Bear in mind that trading is now banned, making the mode fairer and more secure.

The biggest change this year, though, comes in the form of goalkeepers. You've seen the adverts, and you know the score – keepers are now intelligent. It's an interesting direction to take, albeit one that's roughly 20 years too late to the party and should be a given in any football game. Still, the idea here is that keepers act more realistically, there are a large amount of new animations that allow for overly dramatic saves and they know when to leave their line and bear down on an opponent to close the angle.

IT WOULDN'T BE FIFA IF YOUR TWO CENTRE HALVES DIDN'T CLATTER INTO EACH OTHER AND CREATE A GOAL-SCORING OPPORTUNITY EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE



Above: New team sheets mean that you can quickly and easily switch between different team management settings. **Left:** The attention to detail on the pitch is startling, with each blade of grass easy to make out under the players' feet.

The second part is true; there are a lot of different animations now, which make every save seem dynamic and unique. Intelligence though? Not really – it's still annoyingly common for keepers to be caught with their pants down at corners, to get beaten stupidly at the near post and sometimes just ignore the ball altogether. It's a shame, but as usual by *FIFA 2016* it'll have been fixed.

So, goalkeepers aren't as good as promised, the soundtrack is rubbish as usual and the menus still aren't as simple as they could and should be. Regardless, when all is said and done, *FIFA 15* is the best football game we've ever played. It combines match day pageantry and superb gameplay perfectly, and builds nicely on last year's sterling effort. After so many years of trying, EA has, with the exception of a few little missteps, finally gotten player AI right and created a fast, fluid football experience that looks and feels like the real thing. This will go down as the year that EA finally ticked all the boxes.

VERDICT 9/10
THE NEW BENCHMARK

TAKE A WALK IN CLEMENTINE'S SHOES

The Walking Dead: Season Two

Right: This is William Carver, voiced by Michael Madsen. Without giving away too much, he's an important antagonist, an extreme personality with dictatorial control.

The Walking Dead: Season One in 2012 marked the beginning of a trend of games about dads and daughters. From dystopian fiction like *BioShock Infinite* to the post-apocalyptic followers of *The Road* like *The Last Of Us*, games explored parental (biological or adoptive) relationships. *Season One* was about what you – as protagonist Lee – would do to protect the little girl Clementine, how your choices were judged by her, and the relationship you formed as a consequence.

In *Season Two*, you are Clementine. Lee is gone, and so is that protective parental relationship. Few games dare to force players out of the comfortable shoes of a healthy adult man and into those of a child. In a typical action game, the difference would be stark, but given the simplicity of interaction in Telltale's adventure games much here is the same as in *Season One*.

Clementine walks just as awkwardly as Lee, in straight lines and into invisible walls. With fewer of the superfluous puzzles of *Season One*, much of the action outside of conversation involves walking around, clicking on highlighted objects until you trigger the next event.



DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
OTHER FORMATS: Mac, PS3, 360, iOS, Vita
ORIGIN: USA
PUBLISHER: Telltale Games
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £18.99
RELEASE: 26 August
PLAYERS: 1
MINIMUM SPEC: Core 2 Duo 2GHz or equivalent, 3GB RAM, ATI or NVidia card w/512MB RAM, 2GB available space
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

For more involved action, there are still basic quick-time events. They look a little different but work the same, more loyal to the narrative than to the concept of fair play, with some made unwinnable to increase the tension. Sometimes this rapid button-pressing is effective – as when Clementine fights off a walker in a flickering light – and sometimes it's boring.

So far so *Season One*. Sometimes the player must hold down a button and move in a direction at the same time, which makes events like stitching up a wound feel closer to life, like a lighter version of *Heavy Rain*.

Even life-or-death situations are countered with simple controls, red arrows telling you which direction to tap to dodge a walker's outstretched arms, text prompts reading things like, "Hold A to escape!" The latter can pull you out of the moment but do make it easier to avoid the instant death and retry, which – of course – would do the same.

Given that *Season One*'s trickier moments were frustrating rather than an interesting challenge, it's good that *Season Two* feels easier, though it does sometimes feel at odds with Clementine's ability. She can't push heavy objects or reach high ones without help, or shoot a rifle without falling over, but she can dodge multiple assailants and carry out several successive headshots.

SHE CAN'T SHOOT A RIFLE WITHOUT FALLING OVER, BUT SHE CAN DODGE MULTIPLE ASSAILANTS AND CARRY OUT SEVERAL SUCCESSIVE HEADSHOTS

A similar conflict underlies Clementine's interactions with other characters. As she can sometimes remind people in dialogue, she's just a little girl, and yet multiple characters treat her as though she's more mature than any of the adults.

Though it often feels more natural than it did with Lee to use the option to stay silent and let others argue among themselves, it usually eventually falls to Clementine to take responsibility for solving their problems and to face their wrath if and when she fails. The end of *Season One* suggests that Clementine will find new parental figures to replace Lee, but *Season Two* makes that seem impossible, leaving her instead stuck in the midst of never-ending arguments that are more stressful than any antagonists either alive or dead.



Of course, that stress is nothing new. By the end of *Episode 1* the writers have already laid out the narrative formula that tells you this series will echo the last. There's death, distrust, and discord. And no matter what choices you make, the overarching story plays out in the same way.

Because this is a second season, however, as with episodic television the story is escalated. The characters are used to watching people die, and so is the player. Unfortunately, attempts to raise the stakes don't always pay off.

A firefight in *Episode 4* is a messy inclusion without any of the usual subtlety around



BLASTS FROM THE PAST

While your choices throughout *The Walking Dead: Season One* didn't affect the way that story ended, they do pop up in small ways as you play through *Season Two*, though generally only in conversation. Since most of the characters Lee and Clementine encountered in *Season One* are dead, you won't be reunited with many old friends, but keep an eye out for familiar faces just in case. Those who have also played the extra episode *400 Days* will definitely recognise characters in *Season Two*, with one in particular playing a significant role in this new story. Since that episode only takes about an hour and a half to play, anyone who hasn't already should give it a run through before starting *Season Two*.

FAQs

Q. HOW DOES THE GAME START?
A prologue scene takes place several weeks after the end of *Season One*, before the game skips forward 16 months.

Q. WHO'S THE ENEMY?
Aside from the walkers and each other, the biggest threat is a man called William Carver, voiced by Michael Madsen.

Q. DOES IT EVER LIGHTEN UP?
In between arguments some characters do find time to crack jokes, but those moments are pretty rare.





Left: Unfortunately, Clementine will have to reuse the trick of covering herself in walker guts to put them off the scent.

Above: Those who have played through *Season One* will be happy to see two familiar faces at the beginning of *Season Two*: Omid and Christa. Those who have played Season One also won't need to be warned that any happiness can't last.

character motivation. The pacing seems off too: the biggest event culminates at the end of *Episode 3* with the resolution of a conflict with an extreme villain.

While *Season One* was great because of its characters, *Season Two* has a less well-developed cast. Clementine meets so many new people that you barely get to know most.

The slower moments do allow for some great character moments, with one scene around a campfire particularly resonating, but more often characters just seem to argue like children who know a lot of swear words, helping Clementine one moment and turning on her the next.

That internal inconsistency of these characters pervades right through to the end of the season, with one affecting a twist that beggars belief and leaves Clementine with a drastic decision to make. Unlike *Season One*, *Season Two* has distinctly divergent endings, which might seem like a good thing after the disguised linearity of *Season One* were it not for the fact that which you get depends on that one moment, and that they differ wildly in narrative strength. It also fractures the canon, which should have interesting consequences come the arrival of *Season Three*.

Season One of *The Walking Dead* was so noteworthy that it didn't really need a sequel, but *Season Two* will be enough to satisfy many of those left wanting after the first series, even if it doesn't have the same impact.

But its best feature is still its protagonist, whose personal growth stands out against the inconsistency of the other characters, and if there has to be a *Season Three* it'll be all the better if we see more of this element that works so well.

ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

GIRL POWER: Lee was an interesting protagonist because of his past. Clementine is interesting because of her present. She proves herself incredibly capable, which makes for a compelling story.

VERDICT 7/10
MORE OF THE SAME, LESS OF AN IMPACT



Above: Clementine is an interesting enough protagonist, meaning the player won't pine for Lee too much, but she certainly does, and no wonder since no one else she meets is quite as willing to put her first as consistently as he did.

FOR THOSE WHO FIGHT FURTHER

Theatrhythm Final Fantasy: Curtain Call

Few companies understand fan service like Square Enix. This is a company with an entire franchise devoted to what is effectively *Disney* X *Final Fantasy* fan-fiction, for crying out loud; a company that turned a coy leading lady into a pop star for the first ever direct *Final Fantasy* sequel. And while a starved rhythm action following and the *FF* hardcore might have loved *Theatrhythm*, this updated version takes fan service to a whole new level – you're looking at over 200 songs and some 60-odd characters from the franchise, some of which even the most loyal fan would be lying to claim to recognise.

Even so, it's a vast improvement on the original from the off, the clumsy old structure done away with so that you can simply pick your favourite *Final Fantasy* stars and guide them through tunes from their own games. It's a move that relies on series knowledge but then again, would you really buy the second version of a music game that focused on a series you had no interest in? Thought not. And that leaves you in for a treat as you tap, swipe and hold their way through some of the best gaming music ever composed (well, depending on which games you pick) but the fact remains that whether a good 80 per cent of this holds up as great rhythm-action fodder, whether you know where it comes from or not.

With game-specific sets of songs going the same way as Aeris, you're more or less let loose on the vast archive of tunes from the start, and Event stages play a far less significant role. The focus is instead on the two stronger pillars of Battle and Field music, with considerable changes to each. The death of the Stoic bonus is the real blessing for score attack players, meaning you no longer need to unequip everything in order to attain the maximum score on any given song, with numerical values now offering a far better representation of performance. Critical timings aren't all that tricky compared to perfect ratings in rhythm-action peers, but you'll need to be on your game should you take the fight online in the new competitive modes – the game has been out in Japan for close to a year and no punches are pulled, so either know the main songs back to front or don't bother.

A refined quest system replaces the antiquated Dark Notes and it's here that the real RPG essence reaches the nose, with healing items, song replacement tools and special trinkets all changing the way the procession of tracks plays out. It's a vast improvement. It's safe to say that only *Final Fantasy* die-hards and starved rhythm-action fans will find a home here, but both will find it fully furnished and to their liking. A superb update to an already great game, *Curtain Call* deserves pretty much all of the roses it will find at its feet.

DETAILS

FORMAT: 3DS
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Square Enix
DEVELOPER: In-House
PRICE: £29.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-2
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

BETTER THAN: THEATRHYTHM FINAL FANTASY

AS GOOD AS: OSU! TATAKAE! OUENDAN

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

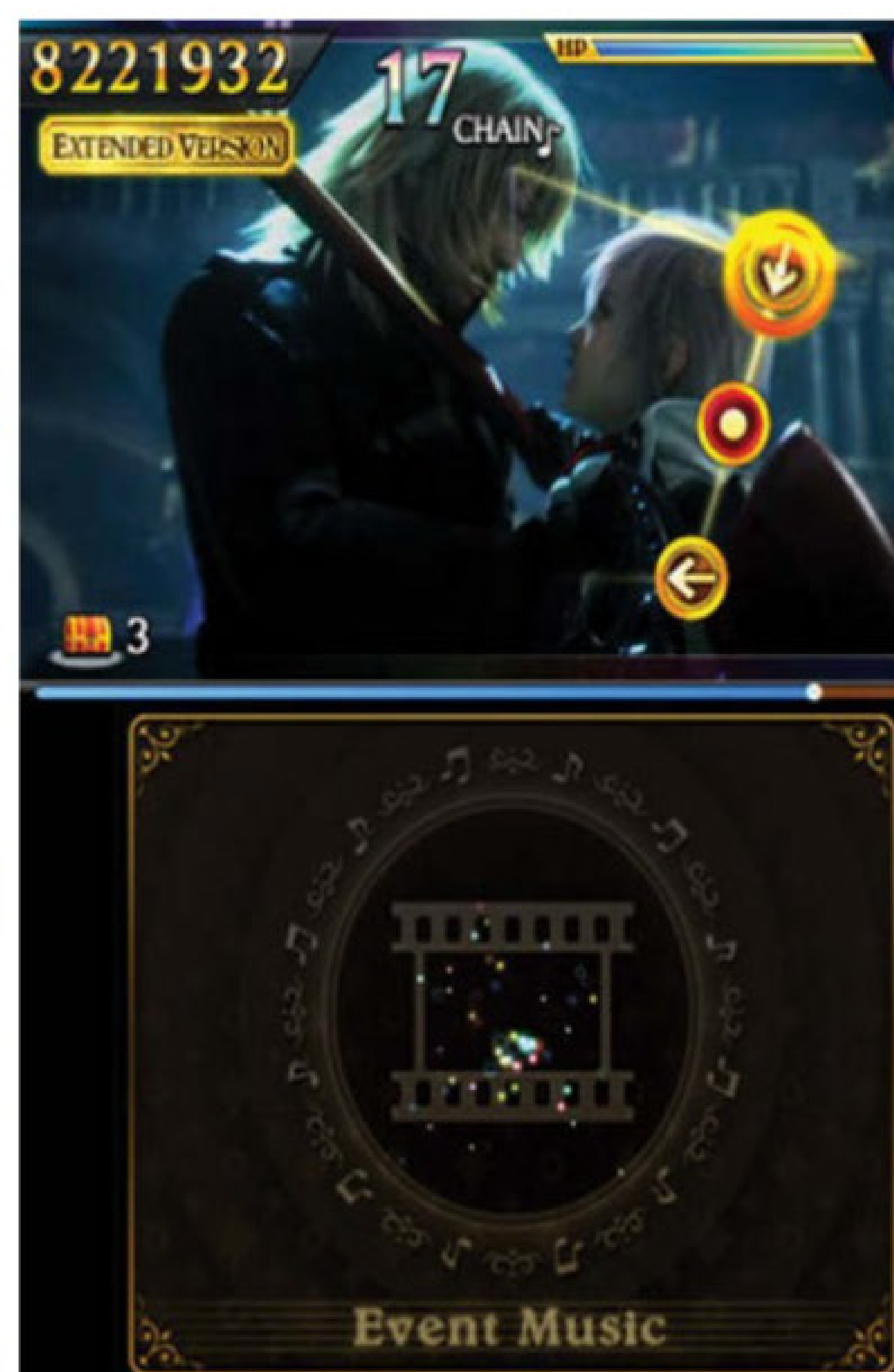
BLACK MAGES: As good as so much of the music on offer is, we'd love to be able to play along with some of the incredible rock covers performed by Uematsu's former live band. The Chocobo Dungeon arrangements will have to do for now...

VERDICT 8/10

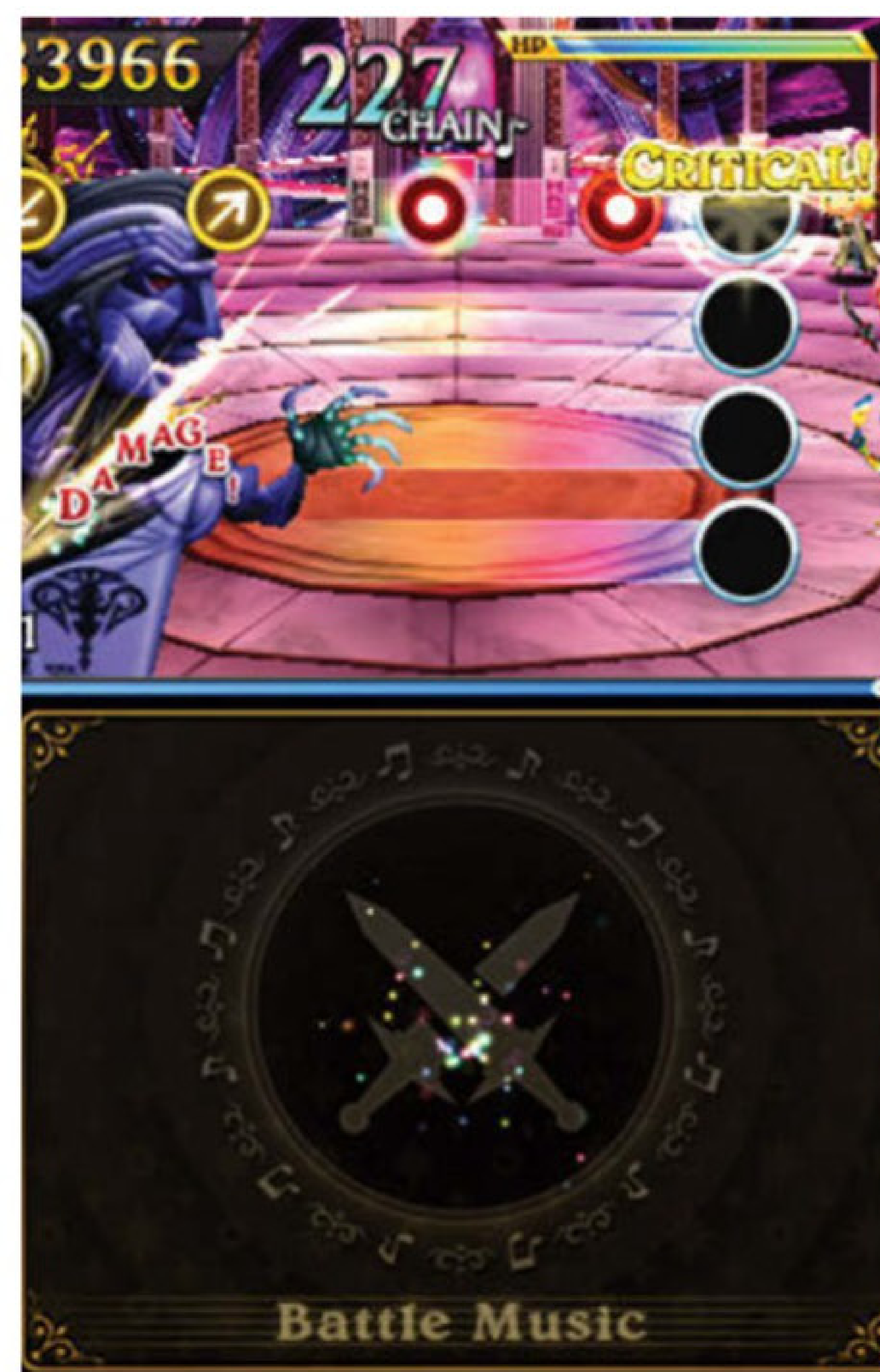
DESERVING OF A STANDING OVATION

Below: The new Field Music slider can be hard to follow if you're used to the original version, but you get used to it.





Above: Quest Medleys are an amazing evolution of the core game's Dark Notes. Somebody's been playing some StreetPass Quest...



SETTLING PLAYGROUND ARGUMENTS SINCE 1999

Super Smash Bros. 3DS

Trying to cram Nintendo's flagship brawler into its 3D handheld console might seem like folly, but for the most part *Super Smash Bros.* for 3DS works. It is by some means a sterling achievement, not least because the chaotic action has been transported from the spacious domain of the television set into a screen no bigger than a post-it note without compromising the core gameplay experience, for the most part.

Running at a slick 60fps, fighting is fluid and responsive; a significantly ramped-up pace in comparison to *Brawl*'s sluggish movement that harkens back to the glory days of its first sequel, *Melee*. Further to that point, it's a much more technical exercise. New additions to the roster such as *Xenoblade Chronicles*' Shulk and *Mario Galaxy*'s Rosalina & Luma feature numerous stances, which can be manipulated to better suit the expanse of the battlefield and the style of opponent. Elsewhere, other new combatants demonstrate a deft design touch, featuring newfound moveset complexities – for example, plant, water and grow a tree as *Animal Crossing*'s Villager will enable you to wield a powerful axe temporarily (and the tree itself can be cut down to achieve an instant KO). The immense level of detail in which new characters have had their source games integrated into their combat style is not only incredibly smart but also makes *Smash Bros.* a fiercely original genre offering.

Pac-Man lobs fruit and transforms into his original pizza-missing-a-slice form to gobble up opponents; Wii Fit Trainer turns stretches into pugilistic prowess and breathing into a health regenerator; while Little Mac features a charge bar that unleashes an instant KO when filled. It's rare for a fighting game to create such a diverse and unique character roster and it is clear that director Masahiro Sakurai is having the most fun of his career turning these famous mascots into strange and unusual prize fighters.

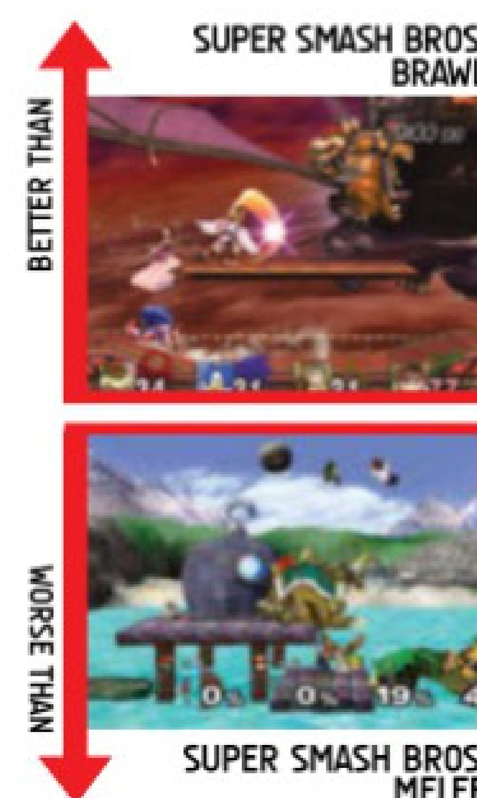


Below: While Brawl disappointed in its unannounced batch of secret characters, the 3DS and Wii U version more than makes up for it with a diverse selection of popular Nintendo characters old and new.

What's more, adding new layers of depth doesn't sacrifice its entry-level accessibility. Where other fighting games are often found to be initially inviting, it's not long before the technicalities that pro players appreciate alienate everyone outside of that demographic. *Smash Bros.* keeps things simple: you bash players until their health percentage hits dangerous high numbers, so that they can be knocked out of the arena; its control scheme broadly mapped to the pad that gives a basic understanding to every character in the game. What's more, this is buoyed by a flurry of items and power-ups that make it possible for even first-timers to get a few KOs in against seasoned vets.

IT'S THE PERFECT SMASH BROS. GAME ON AN IMPERFECT CONSOLE

But the complexity remains there and Sakurai further expands into pro territory with For The Glory online match modes that strips back brawling to its basics and forms an online leaderboard system. Elsewhere online For Fun gives a more playful edge that most players will prefer and offline multiplayer offers the usual glut of customisable options, enabling you to tweak items, times, lives and other options to tailor the experience to your preference. But where *Smash* has always struggled is in providing a compelling single-player to match its addictive multiplayer.



While familiar modes return in the form of Classic and All-Star that twist the classic arcade template, the big new feature is Smash Run. In truth, it's not that dissimilar to the much-derided Subspace Emissary campaign that featured in *Brawl*. The objective is to run around the maze and bash iconic retro enemies until they vomit power-ups. The big difference here is that there are three other players (or computer-controlled characters) doing the same thing and once the five-minute timer hits zero you're thrown into an arena to duke it out utilising the buffs you previously gathered.

While it's an entertaining distraction, the lack of immediacy in the five-minute build-up can feel like a slog and, ultimately, it's not compelling enough to draw your attention away from the more comprehensive multiplayer modes on offer. The fact that new character unlocks are more easily acquired through playing straightforward Smash mode (dropping a new character after around



CUSTOM FIGHTER

One of the most interesting new additions to the *Smash Bros.* roster is the Mii Fighter. Given that the whole point of Miis is to give the player an avatar to imprint their own personality, the fighters here follow suit. You're able to choose a particular fighting class – Brawler, Sword Fighter and Gunner – and then customise the moveset based on existing characters in the game. What's more, certain modes in the game support wider character customisation, which means any fighter can be tweaked and customised to better suit your playstyle. This will all tie into the Amiibos: purchasable figurines that imprint your character's profile and can be purchased later in the year.

FAQs

Q. WHO'S THE BEST NEW FIGHTER?
It's a tough call as individuals have their own strengths. But we spent a lot of time playing as Pac-Man.

Q. FAVOURITE STAGE?
The focus on stages based on handheld games for past Nintendo systems is a masterstroke. The *Kirby's Dream Land* stage is a particular highlight.

Q. WILL THE WII U VERSION BE BETTER?
Almost definitely. The only problem with the 3DS version is the 3DS itself.



Left: There are some changes to returning fighters, particularly Bowser and Pit, while Final Smash moves have been completely overhauled in some cases. For instance, Luigi now uses his Poltergeist vacuum to suck up all the players.

Above: The analogue stick is the cause of much woe, particularly when it comes to pulling off precise *Smash* moves. We have no doubt that the Wii U version will be the preferred of the two when it's released later in the year.

every ten matches, regardless of whether you win or not) rather than requiring the completion of specific challenges is bordering on an admission of guilt.

So it's clear that the actual game is up to scratch when it comes to reimagining the series in portable form, but when it comes to the 3DS measuring up to its home console contemporaries and the results are less positive. The most obvious flaw is the screen size. On a bog-standard original 3DS (which we predominantly played the game on), it's easy to lose track of your role in the fight when four players populate the screen and the camera pulls back to keep everyone in frame. Stages have been designed to specifically evade this problem: the brilliant selection of new and classic backdrops is thoughtfully compact to compensate for the diminutive screen size.

ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

ONLINE MULTIPLAYER: One area where *Smash Bros.* on 3DS excels is in the more comprehensive suite of multiplayer modes and options. Not only that, online play is much smoother this time around with less connectivity issues.

But a more irksome concern is the analogue stick. Simply put, it doesn't have the subtlety needed for an advanced fighting game and pales in comparison to its control-pad brethren. While the unusual control scheme doesn't take long to wrap your head around, the lack of precision in the console's stick leads to frustrating instances of misread inputs and woeful errors. *Super Smash Bros.* for 3DS does an immaculate job of bringing Nintendo's beloved fighting game to the handheld system and has packs in the best character roster and feature list to date, but the shortfalls of its hardware prevent it from reaching greater heights. It's the perfect *Smash Bros.* game on an imperfect console. We wait with much anticipation for the Wii U version later this year.

VERDICT 8/10
THE BEST SMASH BROS. TO DATE RESTRICTED BY ITS HARDWARE



Above: This is without doubt the best selection of characters and stages in any *Smash Bros.* to date.

WAR… WAR NEVER CHANGES

Wasteland 2

We're conditioned to think in gaming that the longer you have to wait for something, the worse it will be. *Wasteland 2* took 26 years to arrive, so it should be awful, right? Well, it's not. At all. In fact, *Wasteland 2* is everything you'd want from a sequel to one of the most-loved cRPGs of the Eighties – faithful to the original, bringing back old elements that will bring a smile to any fan's face, while at the same time modernising the experience to make it more palatable and easier to use than the less user friendly experience of the past.

But *Wasteland 2* isn't just a game for the old fans – this is a role-playing game that any newcomer can get involved with and enjoy. It's an equal opportunities cRPG, designed with care and written with flair, rich in choice and consistent in tone (that being serious and dark, but also funny and satirical) – basically it's the game fans wanted. And not just *Wasteland* fans – any fan of games that aren't beige and homogenised by the large publishers will find something to like in *Wasteland 2*.

You take control of a team of Desert Rangers, tasked with (trying to) bring order and justice to a world that has, quite literally, been blown up. Dozens of missions with even more choices are laid out in front of you, and it's up to the player to make their team, choose their approach and talk to others exactly how they want to.

The game wastes little time before it throws you out… well, into the wastes. From that moment, you're free to do as you please. In fact, from *before* that you're free to do as you please. Try digging up the grave of the recently-deceased Ranger you start the game next to – see what happens if you do it a couple of times. Yes folks, you can turn the Desert Rangers against you – thus shutting off the entire main questline for the whole game. That's the kind of freedom of choice that's been lost in major releases, and it's great to be able to absolutely, almightily cock everything up. Just remember to save a lot and it'll all be fine.

Anyway, once you're out there, *Wasteland 2* is unforgiving – though not impossible. It's certainly hard, and there'll be more than enough times where a jammed rifle is the only reason you see the game over screen. But there are just as many times when your sniper losing his cool and shooting wildly does critical damage to an onrushing cannibal. Swings and

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
OTHER FORMATS: Mac, Linux
ORIGIN: USA
PUBLISHER: inXile Entertainment
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £44.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
MINIMUM SPEC: Core 2 Duo or AMD equivalent, 4GB RAM, 512MB GFX card, 30GB HDD space
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A



Above: It's not the hardest game out there, but make a few mistakes and *Wasteland 2* will punish you, and punish you hard. And if you don't revive those characters using your surgeon skill, they'll be dead for good. Poor Barry…





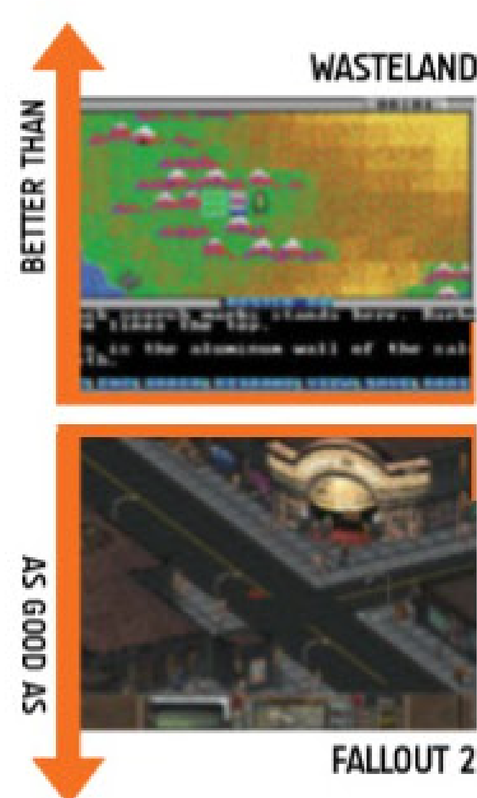
THE ART OF THE CALLBACK

There's a hell of a lot going on in *Wasteland 2* – so much that, as the developer claimed before release, it's impossible to see everything in a single playthrough. Impossible in a couple of playthroughs, actually. And some of the things you might see, hear and discover in *Wasteland 2* are things that won't actually mean anything to you unless you played the original game to death (and still remember encounters, conversations and the paragraph book). These callbacks – insignificant in the grand scheme – just go to show how much care and attention has been put into *Wasteland*. Its creators love the original enough to bring back references from it 26 years later and not bother explaining them. That, in the world of modern gaming, is refreshing.



BETTER THAN

WASTELAND



AS GOOD AS

FALLOUT 2

FAQs

Q. IS IT HARD?
It might initially take some getting used to if you haven't played an old-school cRPG before, but it's not ridiculous. There's always something different you can do.

Q. HOW GRIM IS IT?
It's actually surprisingly funny in parts, but that humour does little to mask the fact you're in a horrible, broken world.

Q. IS IT LIKE FALLOUT?
Yes indeed it is, but then technically *Fallout* was like *Wasteland*.

roundabouts, and all that jazz. And it really does make each and every fight seem like it matters – this certainly isn't a JRPG that spams you with random battles.

While you have the chance to avoid or otherwise evade these encounters, you'll find yourself choosing to jump into them quite often. Why? Well, loot of course. *Wasteland 2* doesn't drown the player in equipment, ammunition and medkits – you'll have enough of all of them, but only if you actively go to liberate items from (often aggressive) wastelanders. There are hundreds of weapons and thousands of other items, from the hidden copy of something called 'Wasteland' you can find, through new pairs of trousers and scrap metal, on to amazing energy weapons that literally melt your enemies.

There's a lot to be found, and a surprising amount of it is useful, though admittedly a lot of it is instantly sold to any trader you can find, as in any other loot-heavy game. This typical drive for loot joins the aspects mentioned – the freedom of choice and exploration, the team you create, the way you approach obstacles (physical and metaphorical) – in making *Wasteland 2* a captivating experience, and one that can easily chew through your free time if you let it. Sometimes even if you don't let it. It has depth in abundance, a shining personality and an atmosphere so thick you can almost feel the sand in the back of your throat. It is a throwback in so many ways to the cRPGs of old, but that was a winning formula then – and now it's been updated to modern standards.

ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

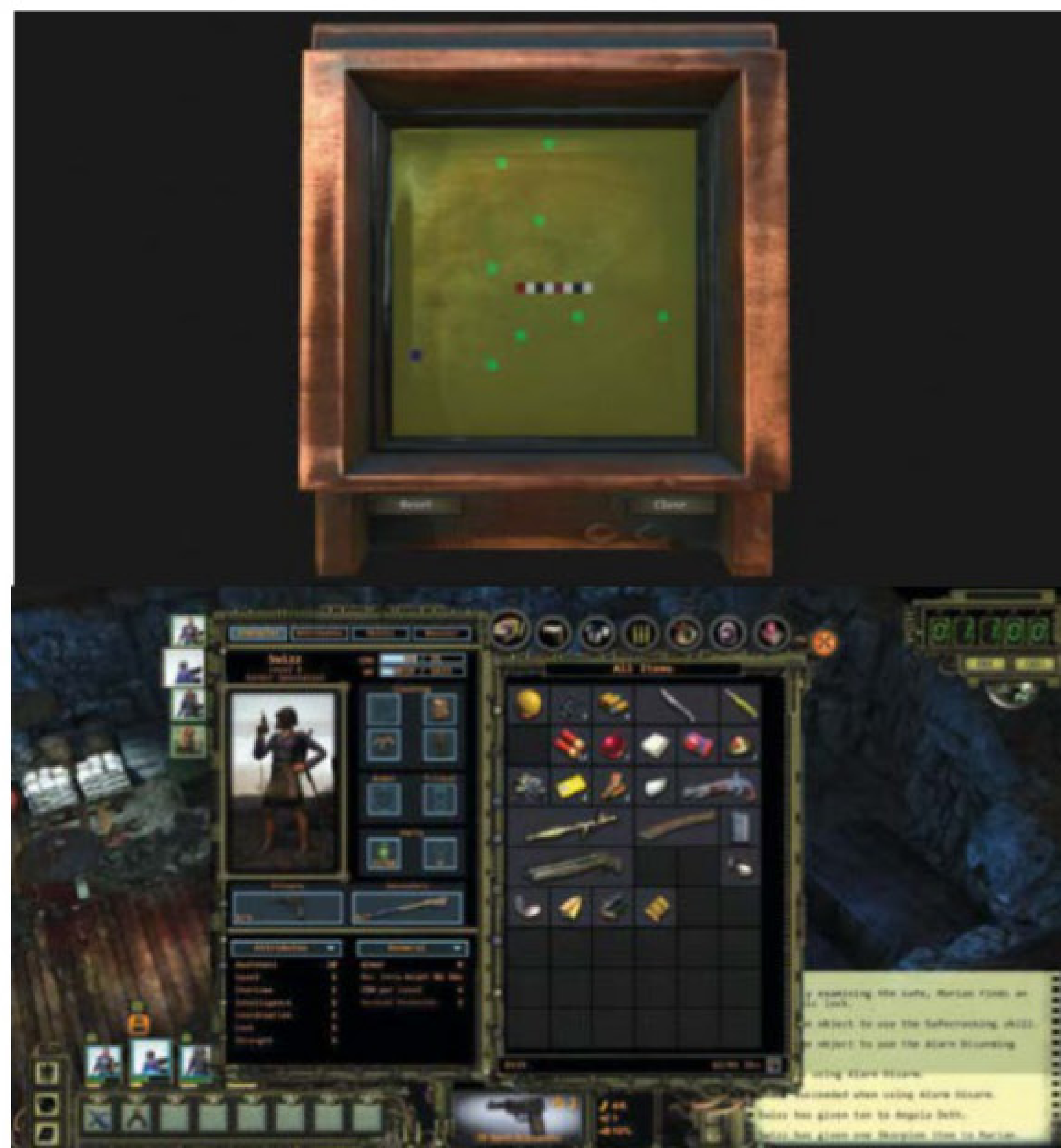
EVERYTHING MULTIPLIED: Obviously they don't look alike, but there's so much about *Wasteland 2* that's recognisable to those who loved the original. Except for one key difference: it's just done *better*.

But you're almost certainly going to find issues with the game, much as we're effusive in our praise of it. It doesn't look amazing, and very much has the feel of being a game made in Unity. But then, it *works*, so looking great doesn't matter – and there's more than enough going on in the world, from the details and environmental elements to the music and excellent sound, to draw you in. It doesn't look fantastic, but with an environment as thick as this it simply doesn't matter.

WASTELAND 2 IS EVERYTHING IT WAS PROMISED TO BE – AN ECHO OF THE PAST THAT SIMULTANEOUSLY FEELS CONTEMPORARY

There are also clunky UI elements – navigating your inventory is irritating, and swapping items between characters just isn't fluid. When you're doing it so much through the game, it needs to be fluid. But as with the looks, it just doesn't really matter. It's a minor inconvenience at most, and one that's probably going to be ironed out with future updates. Beyond these minor points, there's really not much to complain about.

Wasteland 2 is everything it was promised to be. It's a fantastic game; an echo of the past that simultaneously feels (in the most part) contemporary, and a game made with such a clear love, passion and vision behind it that you can't help but feel its 26-year gestation period actually helped. If we only get one or two more Kickstarter-funded games of a similar quality to *Wasteland 2*, we'll be spoilt. Brilliant stuff.



Above: Inventory management is a bit slow and clunky, and as it's so necessary through the game can be a bit of a chore. But only a bit. **Left:** You're never short of things to do out in the wastes, whether they be in Arizona or Los Angeles. There's also no chance of doing everything first time around, thus making it a game you'll get something from each time you play through.

VERDICT 9/10
26 YEARS: WORTH WAITING THROUGH EVERY ONE OF THEM

FIGHT THE POWER

InFamous: First Light

Serving as a prequel to the events of the main game, Delsin Rowe's protégé Fetch roams of the streets of Seattle in search of her kidnapped brother some two years before the events of *Second Son.* Undertaking a series of missions from laconic thug Brett, Fetch more than holds her own as a protagonist – a refreshing change of perspective from the usual smirk-loaded male antihero that unapologetically dominates the medium. In *InFamous: First Light*, Sucker Punch has created a generous portion of add-on content for PlayStation 4-exclusive *Second Son* that recasts one of the game's most engaging supporting characters as the lead and offers a truncated open-world experience that rarely slows down to catch its breath.

But while Fetch as a character offers something different to *InFamous* fans to get behind, the gameplay falls back on the same tired tricks: rush to waypoint, blast some goons, quick pause for exposition and repeat. The scenarios alternate between curbside brawl, sniper mission and vehicle protection (riding on top of a van while taking out pursuing cars behind), only deviating from this structure in a misguided final act that throws players into a corridor shooter.

For the most part this creates, quite appositely for a speed-focused super-being, an admirable pace to proceedings. Fetch bolts from one chapter to the next, with a scant few side-mission to distract, and an energising sense of urgency that was missing from *Second Son*'s campaign. It says a great deal about the lack of personality in *Second Son*'s Seattle when the condescend map, campaign and objectives in *First Light* are remarkably better suited to the underwhelming location. It makes for an open-world game with a breathless sense of momentum, establishing everything it needs to within its serviceable four-or-so hours.

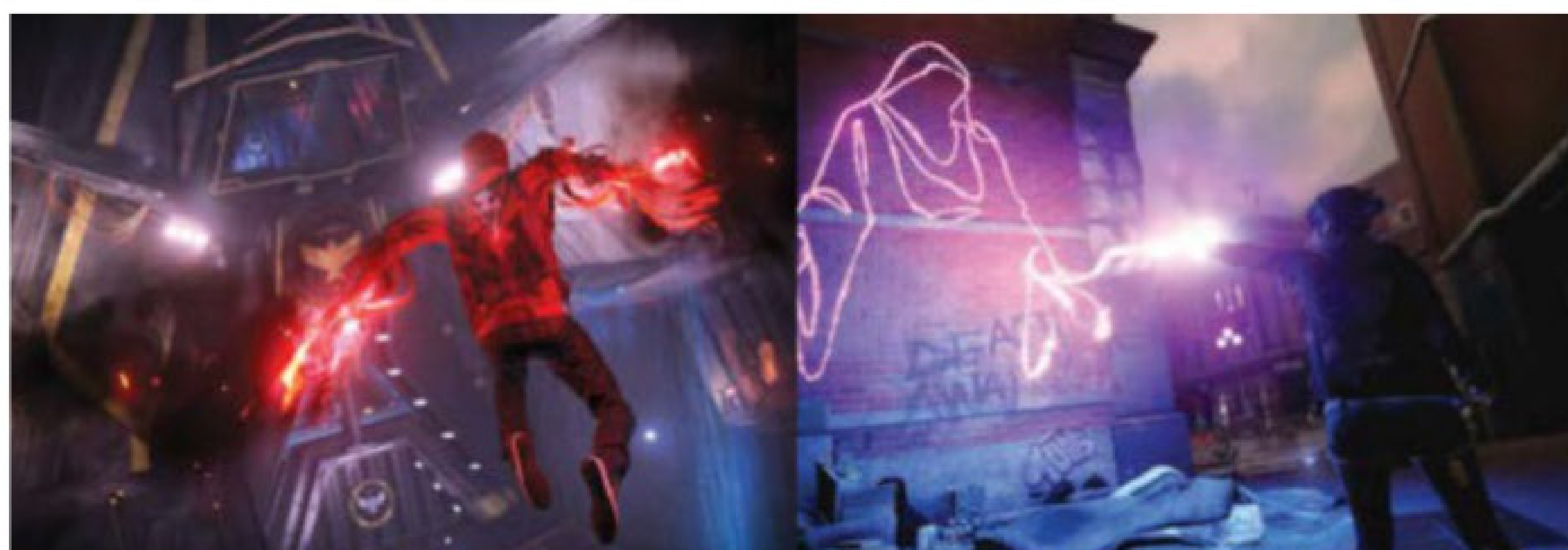
First Light also switches between two time periods: while all the action in Seattle is set two years before the main game's events, the narrative also jump forward to just before *Second Son*'s story as Fetch gets honed into a weapon by DUP. These sections are set within a training facility and are seemingly designed to offer a narrative context to a series of well-constructed challenge rooms and offer a little insight into Fetch's motivations before we meet her in *Second Son*. It also adds a competitive element as well that stretches the longevity somewhat with combat arenas tied to online leaderboards, as well as offering new powers to unlock.

But, once again, this isn't anything we haven't seen before and *First Light* struggles to display any new ideas. But taken as a quick-burst of generic missions, it's a satisfying return to the world of *Second Son* that just about manages to not outstay its welcome.

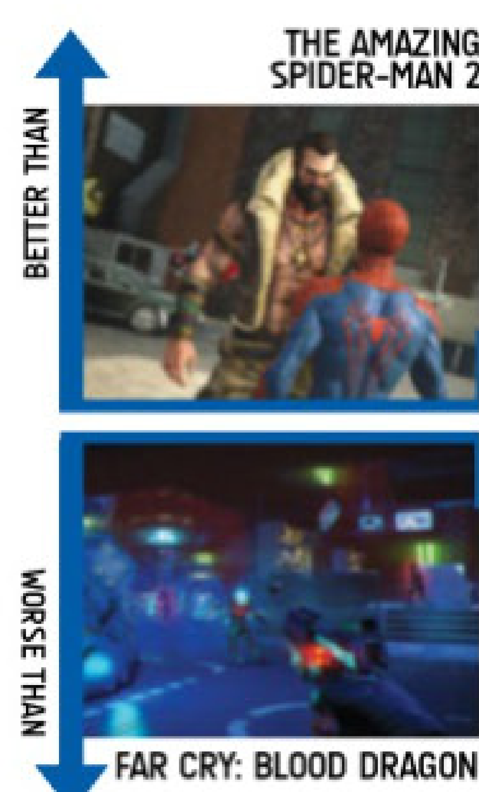
DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation 4
OTHER FORMATS: US
ORIGIN: Sony
PUBLISHER: In-house
DEVELOPER: Sucker Punch
PRICE: £11.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

Below: There aren't many other characters featured in *First Light* outside of Fetch and her Texan mission-dealer Brett. A hacker briefly appears to help out and suggest a team-up, but the idea never leads anywhere.



BETTER THAN THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN 2



WORSE THAN FAR CRY: BLOOD DRAGON

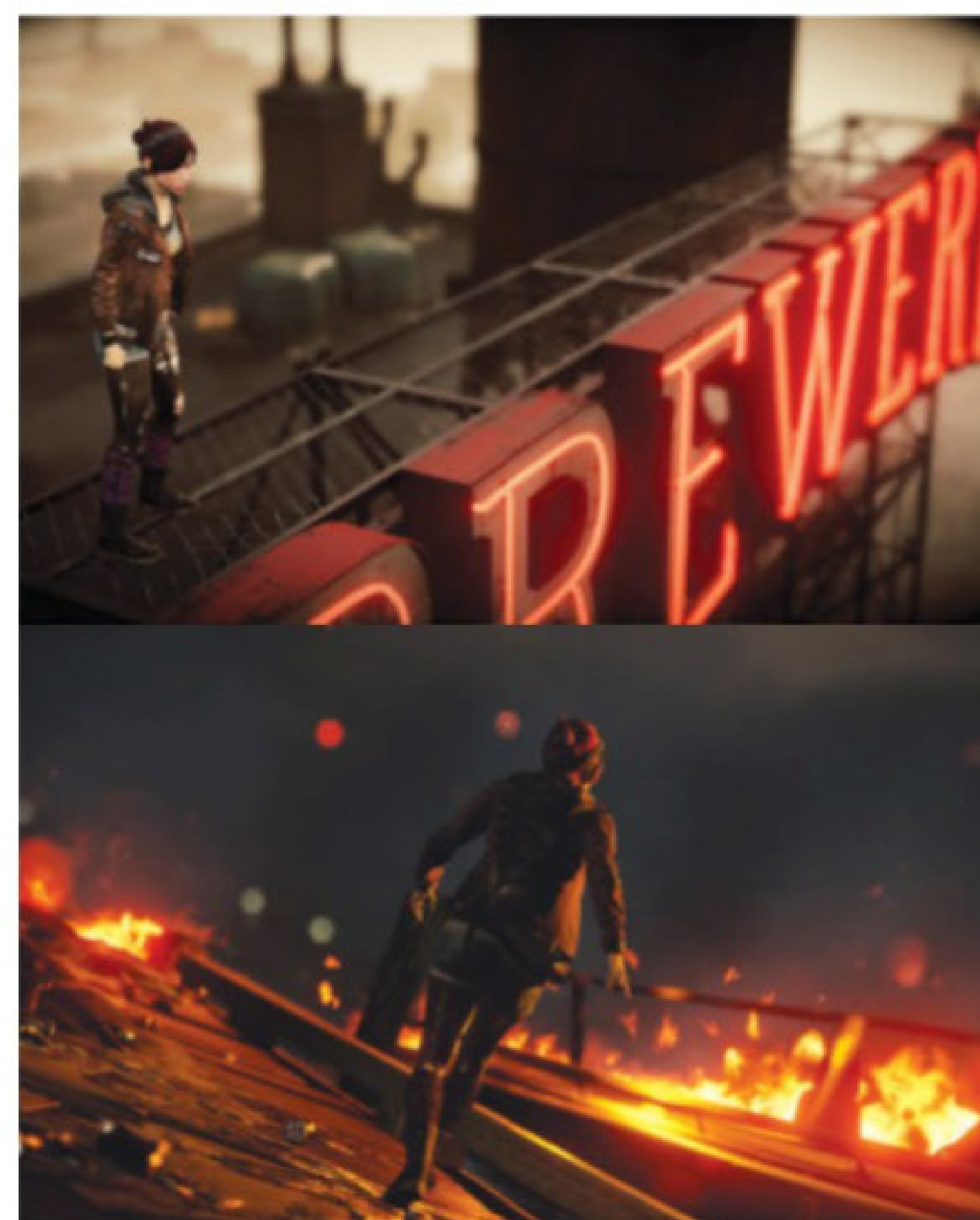
ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

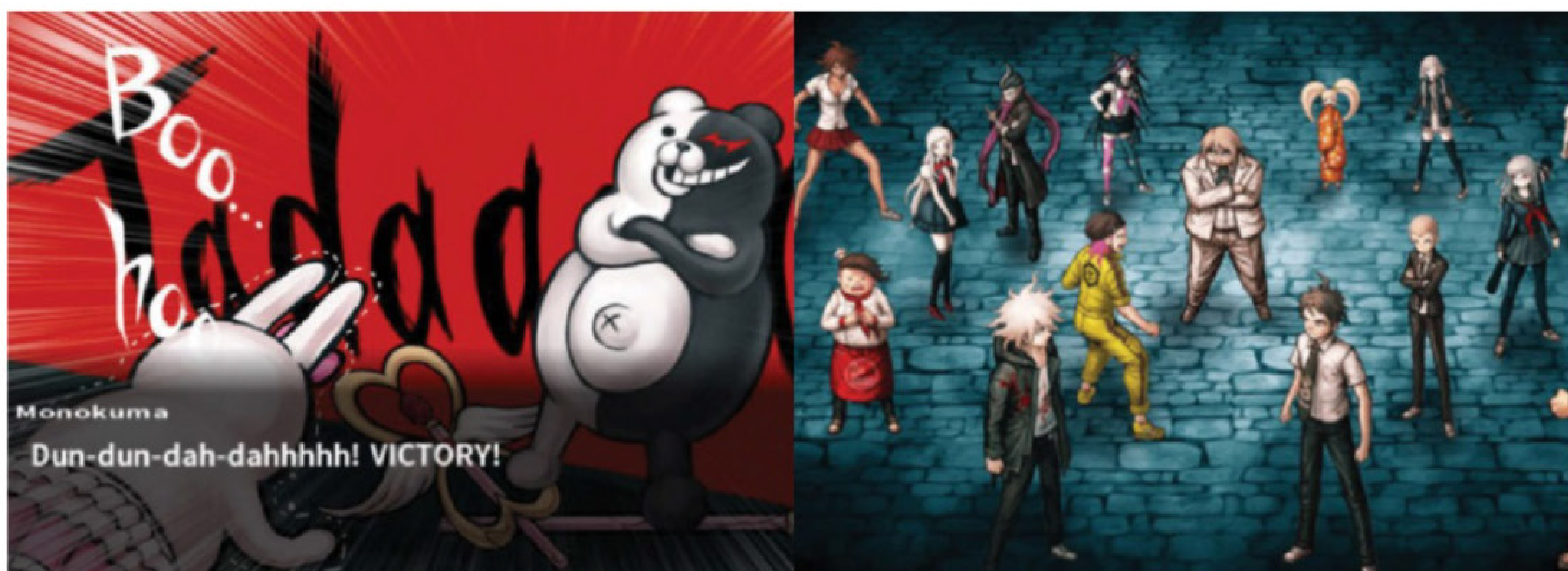
SPEED FREAK: Given Fetch's power of super-speed, maintaining control is fundamental. Fortunately, Sucker Punch has tightened the mechanics to make dashing through the world satisfying.

VERDICT 6/10
A FUN BUT UNINSPIRED EXPANSION



Above: While Seattle lacks much in the way of personality, it's still stunning to look at, with some of the most impressive visuals effects we've seen in any game. Shame, then, that for the most part it feels completely lifeless.





Left: While diverse, the cast of *Danganronpa 2* has many similarities to the previous game's supporting cast… for better or worse…

SCHOOL'S OUT FOR SUMMER

Danganronpa 2: Goodbye Despair

It's only been a couple of months since the West was treated to the first *Danganronpa*, and it's clear that developer Spike Chunsoft knew how watertight the original game was – there's very little that's been changed for the second instalment. It's a unique kind of game, falling somewhere between social sim, point-'n'-click and detective game. Think *Phoenix Wright* mixed with *Persona*, and you're on the right lines. The story is incredibly similar to the first game – you're the best in the country at *something*, and as such have been admitted to Hope's Peak Academy, an institute for the uniquely gifted. The game, similarly to the first, is told through seven chapters, each split into two parts: Daily Life and Deadly Life.

By day, you'll scour the tropical island you find yourself on, earning points for bonding with classmates and exploring the unique personalities of each. Yes, the cast is comprised of cliché character types, but it all plays into the humour and flavour of *Danganronpa*. Give gifts to classmates and visit each of them in turn, and you'll find your progress in the evening sections is made a little easier. The game centres around trying to find a murderer among your peers – some of the characters are so vapid and unlikable you'll take some enjoyment in seeing them brutally butchered. Where *Trigger Happy Havoc* always made the culprit to each murder obvious, *Goodbye Despair* is more subtle – it's not easy to sniff out clues and progress: it really keeps you focused.

There are a selection of minigames that'll keep even the most disinterested sleuth on their toes, too; if the social sim by day, murder mystery by night isn't enough for you, a Tamagotchi-style pet, hangman games, tunnel travelling or comic book panel sorting (yes, really) offer enough oddball entertainment to keep attention spans firmly glued in place. It all ties into what *Danganronpa* did in the first game – the experience is mostly about piecing clues together, and in the sequel that has been made the focus – albeit with better methodology. We were genuinely surprised with some of the revelations we uncovered, smirking at our screen and basking in our own smugness when we avoided the penalty of making an erroneous accusation.

Some of the voice acting will get on your nerves as much as the characters the actors are portraying, and the size of the world can feel a bit restrictive at times, but otherwise *Danganronpa* is a great game. A sunny, upbeat soundtrack, unique puzzle-solving and some gorgeous artwork all combine to present a refined, smarter version of the *Danganronpa* formula so clearly laid out in *Trigger Happy Havoc*.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Vita
OTHER FORMATS: PSP
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: NIS America
DEVELOPER: Spike Chunsoft
PRICE: £24.99
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1

BETTER THAN: DANGANRONPA: TRIGGER HAPPY HAVOC

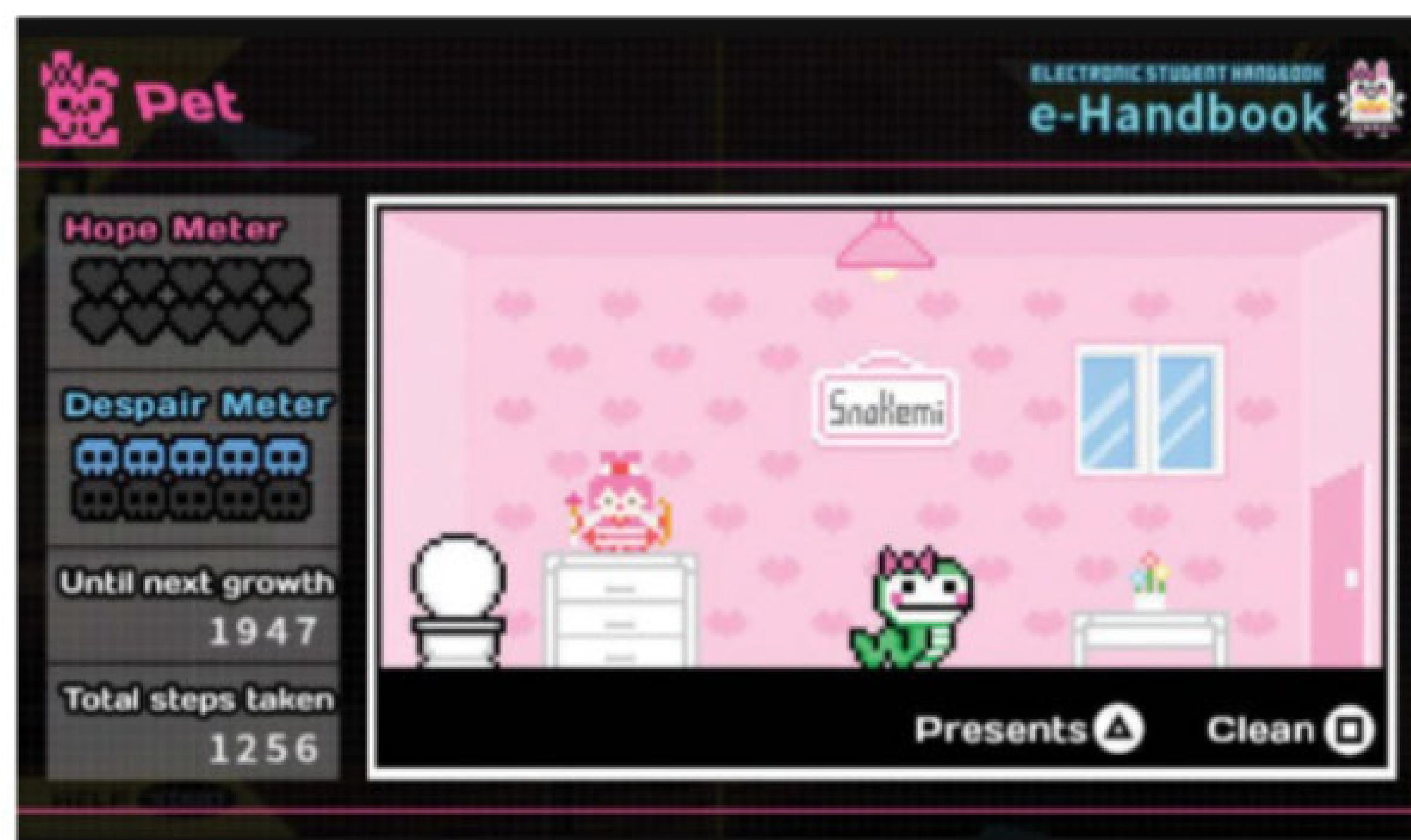


WORSE THAN: PHOENIX WRIGHT: ACE ATTORNEY

FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

CLUE? D'OH!: You'll spend more time than you think reviewing evidence and trying to prise the truth out of seemingly obvious situations. It's put together very intelligently.

VERDICT 8/10
STICKS TO A FORMULA, BUT DOES IT WELL



Above: The Tamagotchi stored in your Pause Screen is like a minigame unto itself – it adds a pretty engaging distraction from the main game.



GRACEFUL COSMIC DUELS, WITH NOT A JEDI IN SIGHT

Starwhal: Just The Tip

Indie outfit Breakfall's original mandate for *Starwhal: Just The Tip* was to produce something competitive, creative and immediately fun. It succeeded: *Starwhal* is all of these things. It also has the potential for moments of glorious showboating, a deceptively nuanced control scheme and is topped with a large dollop of straight-up crazy. You play as a starwhal, a cosmic cousin of the Earth's own unicorn of the sea, the narwhal. Floating in neon-lit space your plucky starwhal can sport a variety of offbeat outfits – from afros to angel wings, and lightsabres to bacon rashers – and then, having set a sufficiently daft tone, it's off to the arena to do battle in deadly horned-combat with up to three local players or AI.

There are four versus modes that take in a last-starwhal-standing, score attack, zone control and possession but while you're battling other players you'll start out by grappling with the controls. Deftly dodging potential frustration, these early battles between equally feckless buddies see *Starwhal* at its most ludicrously gleeful. The simple control scheme consists of pushing one button to move in the direction your starwhal is facing and another two to turn left and right. Complicating this elementary system are momentum and gravity, which ensure that you constantly have to adjust your course or risk your starwhal spinning aimlessly around the screen. Amidst wrapping your head around its physics and controlling your giggles at its effects, you're also trying to pierce the hearts of your rival starwhals in free-for-all or team-based melee or to claim control points to dominate your opponents.

Soon, the laughter fades to be replaced by strained concentration as lackadaisical sideswipes give way to more precise turns, feints and lunges. As skill replaces luck and the tension mounts, tiny adjustments to your movement can see you skewer your brightly coloured foes or perform a last minute dodge to evade a pointy death.

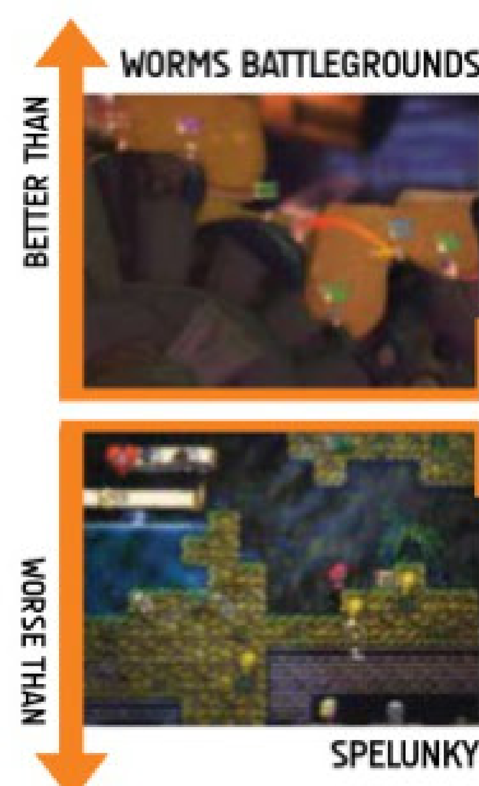
The single-player modes take in obstacle courses, time attack, target popping and ghost data across 30-levels. All sport their own environmental obstacles waiting to obliterate your gyrating mammal or send it bouncing off course and it's here, away from the madness of multiplayer, that the nuanced controls are most evident. Through patience that not all its players will possess, you'll learn to perform the graceful speed-runs necessary to net you the highest medal rankings.

With two players on keyboard and two on controllers, *Starwhal: Just The Tip* is a riotous sofa-buddy multiplayer experience that also offers a solid single-player challenge. However, it would benefit from a far greater number and variety of levels along with more comprehensive stat-tracking to lend persistence to its versus rounds. Nonetheless, like its titular starwhal, it wears its heart on its sleeve and has a decent stab at striking a fine balance between the sublime and the ridiculous.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
OTHER FORMATS: PS3, PS4, Wii U
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Breakfall
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £6.99
RELEASE: Out now (PC-only)
PLAYERS: 1-4 local
MINIMUM SPEC: Microsoft® Windows® Vista / 7 / 8, 2GHz processor, 1 GB RAM, DirectX 9 compatible graphics card with at least 256MB of video memory, 450 MB available space.

BETTER THAN **WORMS BATTLEGROUNDS**



WORSE THAN **SPELUNKY**

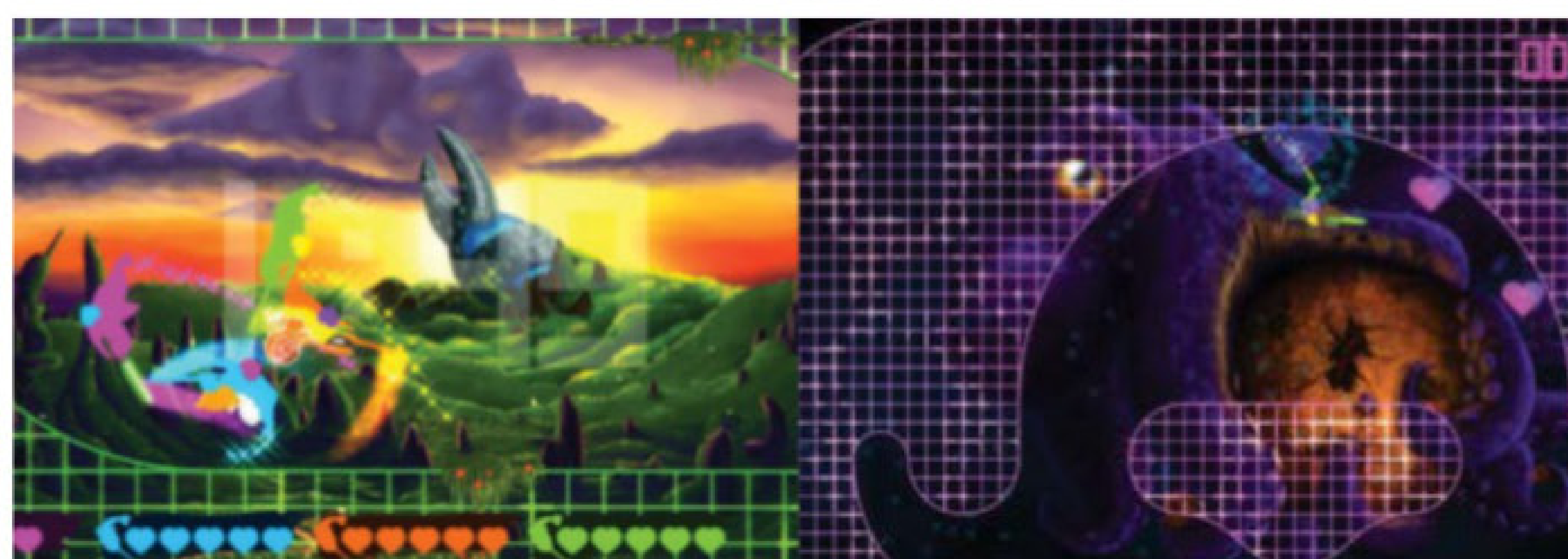
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WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

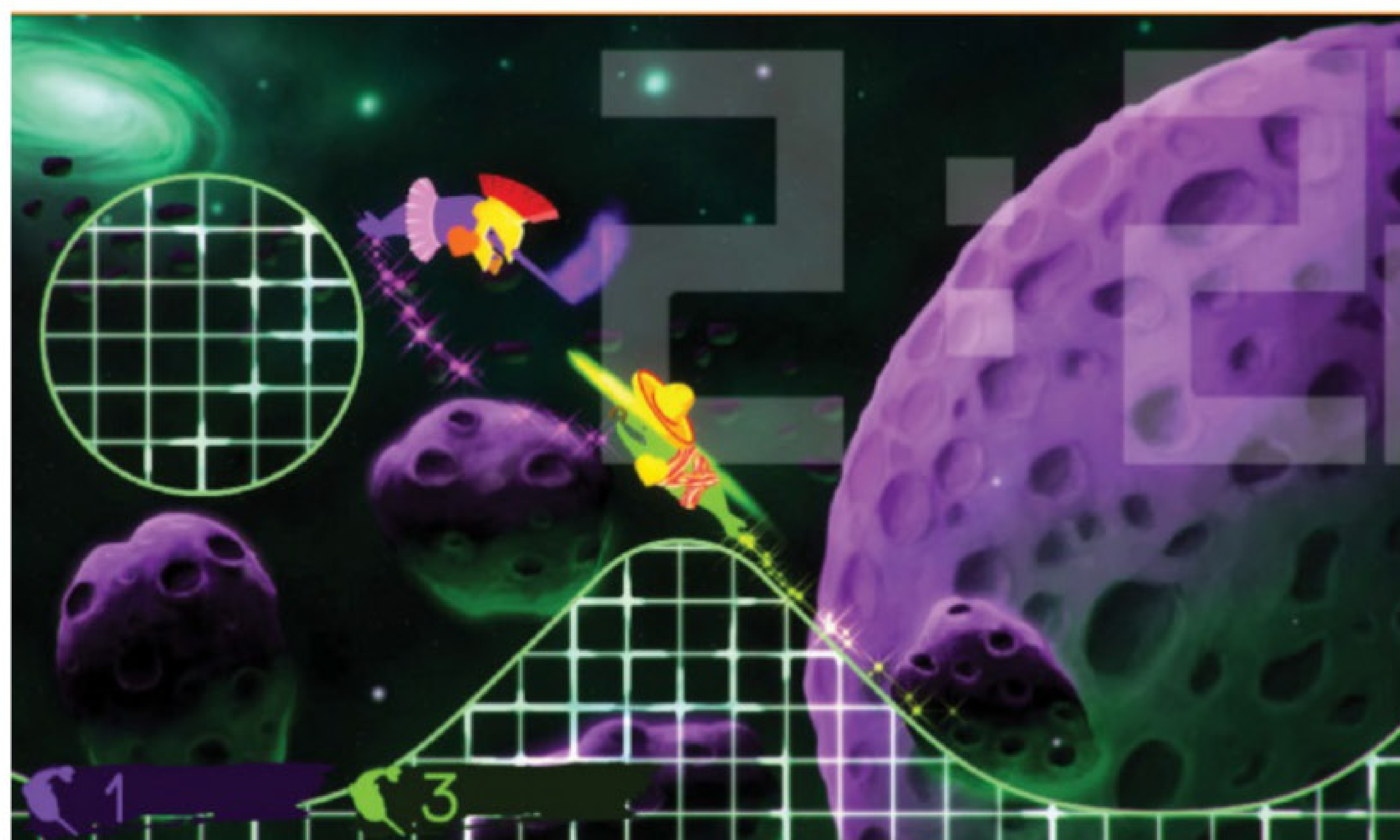
BIGGER PICTURE: All of the modes have their place but a persistent tournament mode would ensure there could be no arguments as to who won the most games – or pierced the most hearts.

VERDICT 7/10

FULL OF HEART AND IRIDESCENT SPACE-WHALES



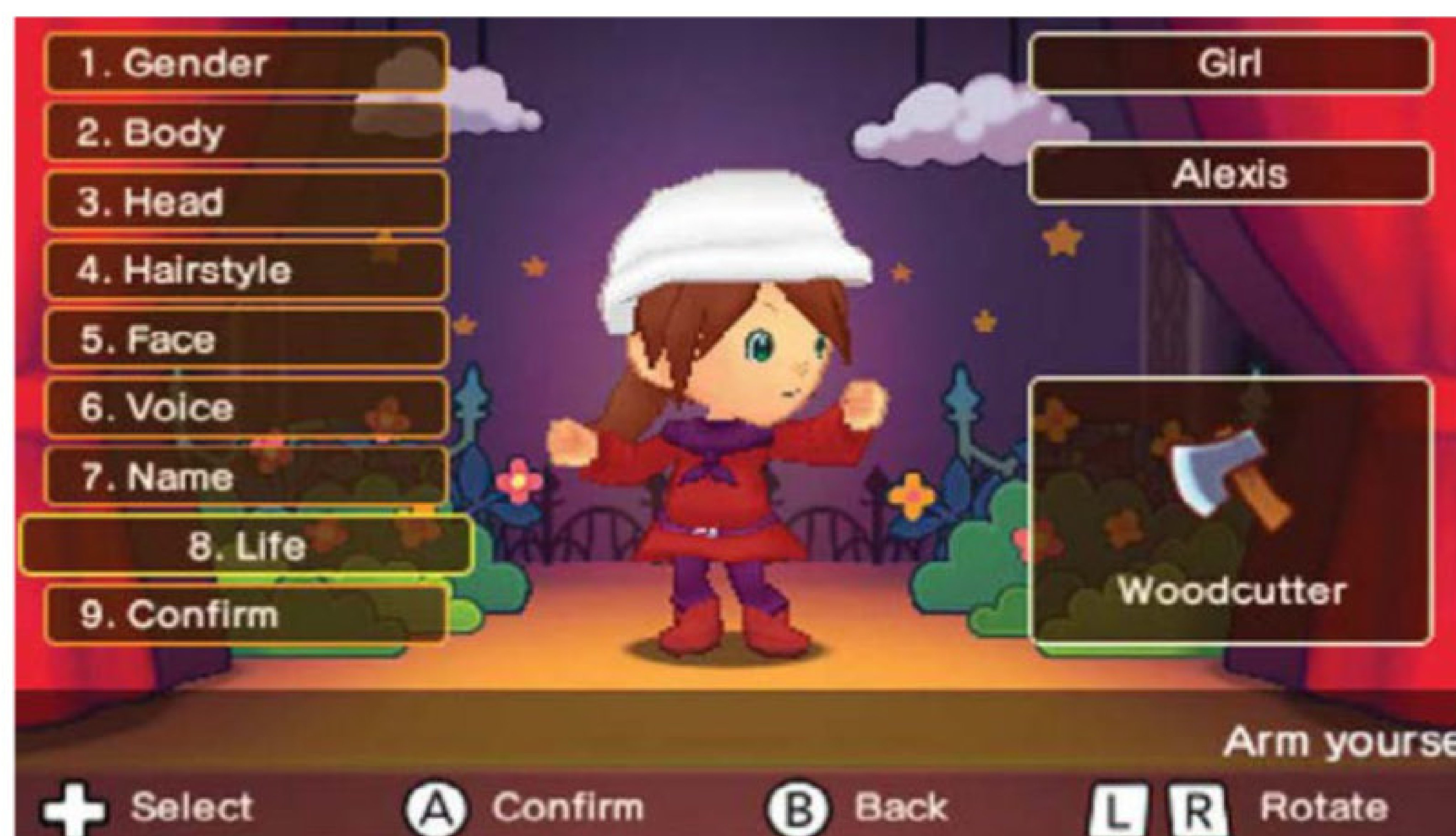
Below: Single-player offers a different challenge to the multiplayer modes but would benefit from a tiered progression system and a friends leader-board.





Above: There's a strong sense of "just one more go" in all of *Starwhal*'s modes, highlighted by the fact that there's an achievement for dying 10,000 times in challenge mode and playing 10,000 rounds of versus – it's *that* sort of game.

Below: As you'd expect from a game with this much freedom, your character is customisable, from their gender to appearance to voice. Once you start playing, you'll be able to change the hairstyle and dress up your character.





Above: Each Life that falls under the umbrella of crafting has a similar mini game: a workbench with three stations at which you either tap the A button repeatedly or press it at the right time. With practice, the process can be automated.

DETAILS

FORMAT: 3DS
OTHER FORMATS: N/A
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Level-5
PRICE: £34.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-4 Local/Online
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

ESCAPE FROM REALITY

Fantasy Life

The usual problem with wearing many hats is that some will tend to fit better than others. *Fantasy Life*, an RPG built around the ability to switch between 12 Life classes, manages to avoid imbalance by keeping things simple. Those disappointed by that underlying simplicity will likely feel the same about the rest of the game, but the rest will find much to enjoy, particularly in the sheer simplicity of the game.

Those 12 Life classes, for example, can be reduced to three categories. While each Life has its own related outfit and tools, the core activity is more or less the same for those in the same category. Woodcutters and miners are both kinds of gatherer, and both involve holding down the A button until the raw material is yours. Tailors and blacksmiths share a mini game in which you perform quick-time events at a workbench. Along a similar vein, hunters and paladins get weapons put to use in simple real-time combat.

What's most appealing about the availability of these different classes is that while the overarching story does cast your customisable character as the hero helping to save the world, you also get an idea of what it's like to be an ordinary citizen. Why take on monsters when you could simply level up by fishing and even earn yourself a Bounty for catching a particularly large one?

The first few times that you switch to a different Life you will see this colourful fantasy world through new eyes, picking out different areas and objects of importance, but the motivation to keep switching is weak. Particular skills improve faster when you're playing as the relevant Life, but they do carry across when you switch, as do your belongings. Your stats might differ too, perhaps giving you more health as a paladin, but it doesn't feel like a necessary consideration in a game this easy.

The developers really aren't interested in giving players a hard time here. Big fights can be skipped, while Life processes can be automated. Everything is streamlined enough to ensure that the player has continuous light enjoyment. You could almost call it a casual game, albeit a highly polished one with a charming – if not particularly engrossing – plot, beautiful animated interludes, and plenty of effort spent on localisation.

With three types of quests – Challenges for your current Life, your talking butterfly companion Flutter's Requests, and Other Requests from NPCs – on top of the story, and three types of rewards – Stars (experience), Bliss, and Dosh respectively – for completing them, *Fantasy Life* is a game of many similar achievable goals. You won't play it for either the story or challenge, but simply to pass the time, perhaps collecting Bliss to get a pet or Dosh to buy new furniture for your house. This is RPG lite, *Animal Crossing* plus questing, and for some people that's absolutely fine.

WORLDWIDE
TAKING GAMING ONLINE

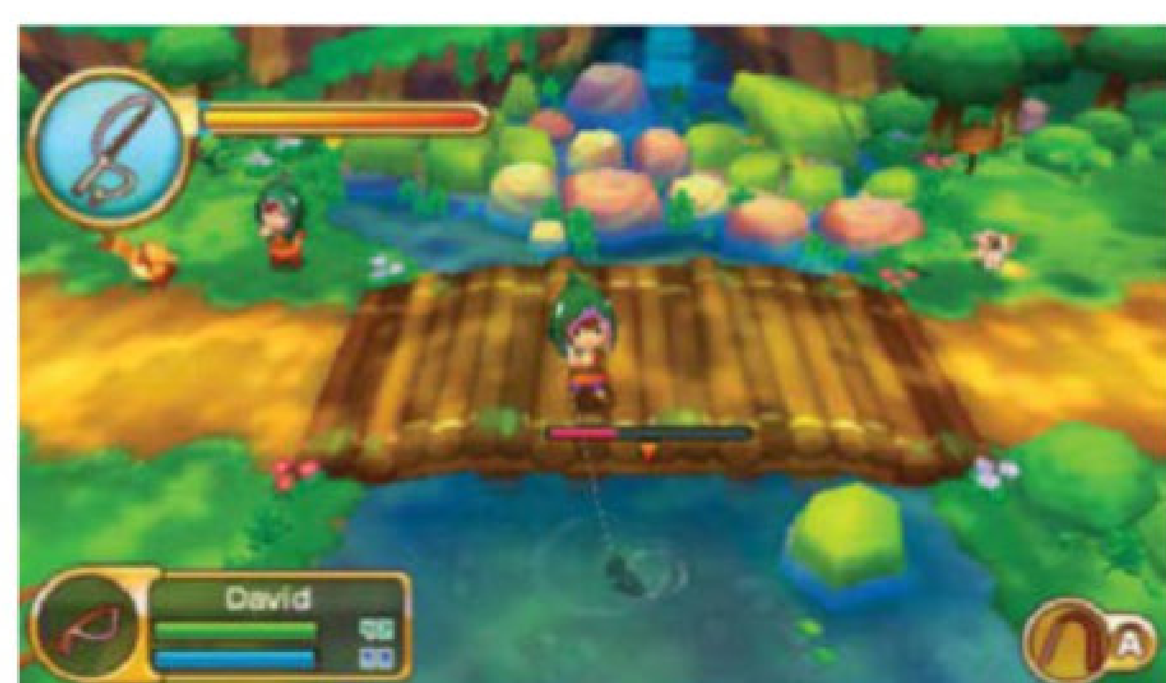
TAKING GAMING ONLINE: As with *Animal Crossing*, you can invite local or online friends into your game. You can't take them on story quests, but you can trade items and fight monsters together.

BETTER THAN: TOMODACHI LIFE



WORSE THAN: PROFESSOR LAYTON AND THE AZRAN LEGACY

VERDICT 6/10
PLENTY OF BREADTH, BUT NOT MUCH DEPTH





THE DATING GAME

Hatoful Boyfriend

There's no small amount of novelty to the enjoyment derived from wandering the corridors of elite all-bird high school, St. PigeoNation's Institute. As the sole human enrolled in the establishment, you spend your time interacting with a menagerie of different male birds finding the right one to date because, well, interspecies romance is the norm here.

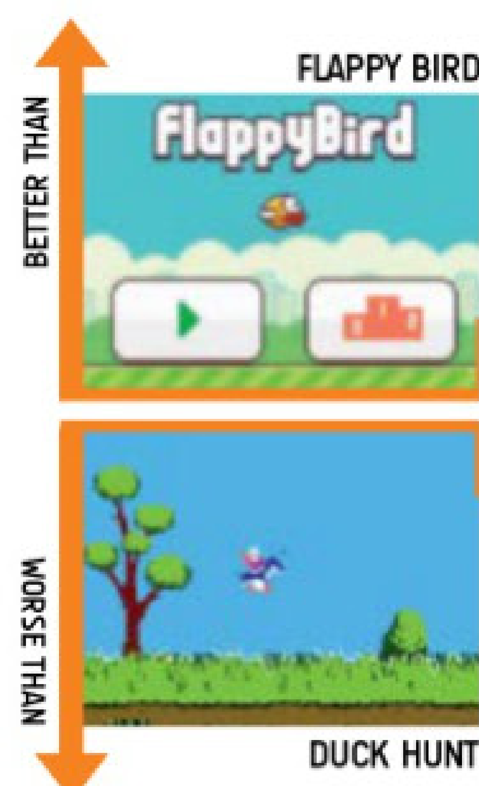
But look beyond *Hatoful Boyfriend*'s fowl visuals (sorry) and there's not a lot to differentiate it from most simulators of its ilk, requiring a few mouse clicks to progress through its storyline. Visual novels aren't known for their complexity and this is no different – you cycle through an hour or so of dialogue and make a couple of choices to determine your end path. However, to really complete it requires playing through the story multiple times in order to fully explore the various narrative paths of the eight prospective bird suitors. It doesn't stop indulging in the bizarreness of its concept for a moment, with static images of a variety of bird-types moving onto the screen to spout some weird gibberish about their lives (not to mention a few atrocious puns), while mysterious documents in the archive further flesh out the details of the world.

Unfortunately, the niche appeal of its amusing concept is relatively short-lived, and while there's an abundance of knowing humour and irreverent wit to keep laughs regular enough, the uneven pacing makes much of its story a slog. More so, it struggles further when it tries to be more of a *game*. The levelling system enables you gain wisdom, vitality and charisma on elective days and during random events, however it's not made explicitly clear what benefits this has on your playthrough, making the entire mechanic superfluous.

However, those that persevere and plough enough time to complete the main paths will be treated to a darker Hurtful Boyfriend path, which explores the apocalyptic themes merely hinted at in the main story. Quite surprisingly, deeper themes are explored here and the game truly embraces the weirdness of its concept, making for the most gripping and well-written portions of the entire story. However, there's a lot of bland flirtations to get there that will no doubt put some players off. Unsurprisingly, it's a game about personality and those that spend time investigating all of the characters will get the most out of it, and even find something much more interesting at the end of it all. However, beneath the feathers there's not much beyond some funny beats and a bizarre concept, with its pacing issues disrupting the story to a grind. Ultimately, this is a run-of-the-mill dating sim that, while fun, is a hard game to love.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Devolver Digital
DEVELOPER: Mediatonic
PRICE: £6.99
RELEASE: Out Now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A



FINGERPRINT

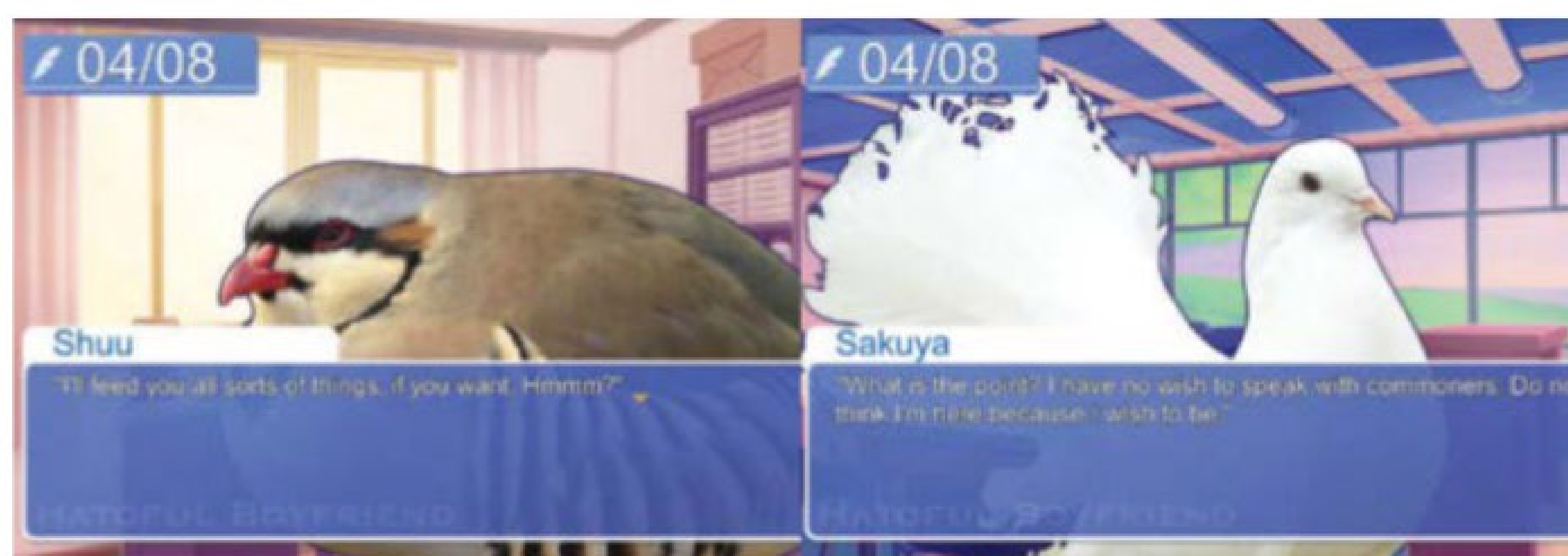
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

BIRD BRAIN: How many dating sims can you name where you play as a human walking around a school flirting with birds and making out with them behind the bike shed?

VERDICT 6/10

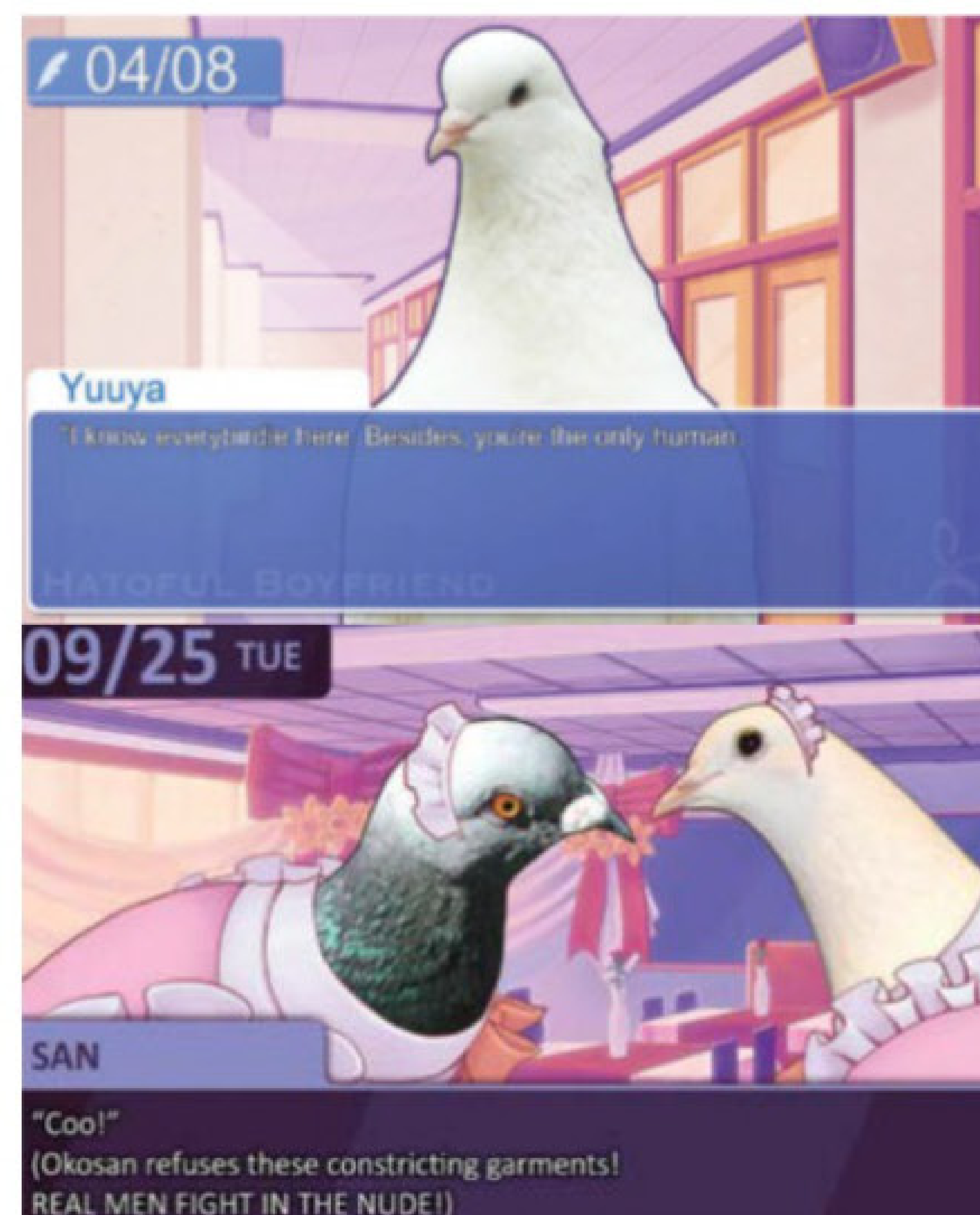
A ONE-NIGHT STAND RATHER THAN ANYTHING LONG TERM

Below: There's plenty of bird action outside of the school, with winged creatures running coffee shops and roaming the streets in gangs. These offer some of the games most amusing visual gags.





Above: If you complete each of the game's narrative paths you get a much darker version of events. Weirdly, it's here that *Hatoful Boyfriend* shows its greatest strengths and the insanity of the concept takes on a whole different meaning.



WHY I ❤…

HALF-LIFE 2

BOB RAFEI, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, BIG RED BUTTON ENTERTAINMENT

“*Wow, where to begin? Obviously* The Legend of Zelda, Sonic *and* Mario *all played a key role to open up my love for third-person character action, and then I'd have to say it was that* Doom *sealed my fate for becoming a game developer. However, I'd have to say that it'd be* Half-Life 2, *more than any other game, which played the most pivotal role for me in terms of highlighting just how good games can be [at environmental storytelling and creative engaging interactive narratives]. It was incredibly transparent in how it illustrated how mechanics and story can* absolutely *work together to achieve something special in our very unique medium.*”





“Half-Life 2 illustrated how mechanics and story can absolutely work together to achieve something special in our very unique medium”

BOB RAFEI, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, BIG RED BUTTON ENTERTAINMENT

RETRO

NO.153

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BEHIND THE SCENES

RUNESCAPE

RuneScape is one of the biggest names in MMOs and helped shape the way the genre evolved over the years. games™ looks at how the legacy began

CONSIDERING THE HISTORY of the MMO genre, you'd expect to have seen far more innovation over the years. It's a fairly stagnant genre, but there's always been one game – spanning a huge player base, even to this day – that remained constant in its own core design tenets. *RuneScape*, in fact, set a precedent for a lot of what would become staples of the genre, namely an emphasis on accessibility to open up as wide a group of players as possible.

In actuality, *RuneScape* began long before the term 'MMO' was even conceived, back when 'MUD' was the go-to definition. Multi-User Dungeons had been around since as early as the late Eighties and continued in various forms of popularity into the late Nineties where – with technology pacing forward – it became increasingly apparent that the future was in graphical MUDs. It was inevitable, and at the beginning of the millennium it became a race to dominate this otherwise fairly limited market. The technical issues involved were vast, but whoever managed to crack it had almost guaranteed success.

"The first requirement for the game was that it needed to be quickly accessible from computers with pretty lightweight hardware and internet speeds," says Mark Ogilvie, design director on *RuneScape*. "The founders were frustrated that at university, they would use different computers in libraries all over campus and have to install their current favourite game from a physical disk. That process would cut into precious gaming time, so they decided to make something themselves based around their early RPG and tabletop experiences, which they could play with other people at the same time. One of the founders loved making systems and engines, the other loved making quests and designing worlds, so it all fell together rather nicely."



Released: 2001
Format: PC
Publisher: Jagex
Developer: In-house
Key Staff: Andrew Gower, Paul Gower, Mark Ogilvie



This mobile boot file would later become one of *RuneScape*'s key innovations. Though it wasn't the first to the GMUD market, it provided an accessibility that would later entice millions. Preceded by *Ultima Online* and *EverQuest*, the Gower brothers wanted to create their own equivalent, with Andrew handling the systems powering it and Paul designing its world. Most of all Andrew had wanted a game that was at once easy to access and to get into, but offered the same kind of depth and interaction that came from popular tabletop RPGs. But there were unexpected positive side-effects to Andrew's streamlined design – despite being graphics-focused, *RuneScape* managed to remain svelte enough that changes could be made quickly and efficiently.

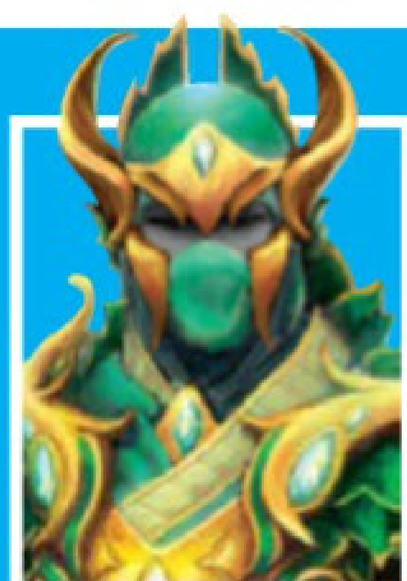
This was a small operation, however, and Jagex was still being run out of the Gower's parents' home in Nottingham while they studied at university, and so the early days required everyone to pitch in. "Everybody turned their hand to art," explains Ogilvie. "They got a few sketches from a friend for some ideas of what a goblin or a dragon might look like; the whole family got involved – [the Gower brothers'] mum created bears, their little brother made a bat… all sorts. Only much later did they even consider actually hiring people to create assets! In the beginning it was still very much a bedroom project for fun and for them, not for an audience with expectations on quality."

RuneScape was not set out to become a success, but instead a means for the Gower brothers to make the games they wanted to play and little else, a facet that still remains true at Jagex to this day. Ogilvie even adds that the original sketches created for the early incarnation of *RuneScape* are the very same ones that "act as a foundation for every dragon, goblin or bear rework we consider". It's a humbling story for such an important MMO, and it all began with that focus on speed to make better use of limited time at library computers.

RuneScape originally released in beta form in January 2001 and, later that year, Jagex would be formed. Within that year *RuneScape*'s popularity began to rise, particularly among students and schoolchildren who,



RuneScape's medieval setting was accessible enough to draw in a large audience of gamers, but has since expanded to include many themes.



A TIMELINE OF RUNESCAPE

The journey of one of the first MMOs to find mainstream and widespread success

JANUARY 2001
RuneScape is released from development and into beta phase, acting as a soft launch for the new graphical MUD.

SEPTEMBER 2002
More than a year after the launch of the beta, Tutorial Island is added to the game, giving newcomers a place to learn the mechanics in a relatively safe environment.

OCTOBER 2002
After a string of new quests, a new update tweaked gameplay, added in a new town and spells, and improved monster AI.

2001 — 2002 — 2002

JANUARY 2003
A brand new mini-game is added, 'gnomeball'. This is a variant of American football, but with a focus on melee combat too.

AUGUST 2003
RuneScape's 50th quest update is added to the game, celebrated by being the longest new quest yet.

DECEMBER 2003
RuneScape 2 enters beta, with new *RS2* servers being added to those willing to test the newest version of the game.

2003 — 2003 — 2003

MARCH 2004
RuneScape 2 is officially launched, with players being given the option to switch their account to the new game.

JUNE 2004
In-game player moderators are added, allowing respected members of the community to ensure the game is played fairly by all.

JULY 2005
Farming is added to the game to allow players to grow their own goods, and assist in their crafting professions.

2004 — 2004 — 2005

MAY 2006
Player-owned houses are added to the game, giving everyone who can afford it a place to call home.

MAY 2007
In-game Achievements are added to the game, initially restricted to a particular zone and later expanded upon.

NOVEMBER 2007
The Grand Exchange is added to the game, giving players a place to buy and sell their most valuable items.

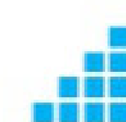
2007 — 2007 — 2006

OCTOBER 2008
PvP worlds are added to *RuneScape*, special servers that have PvP enabled – and if you die you'll lose all your items.

JULY 2011
Clan Citadels are added to the game, the oft-requested feature allowing clans to meet up in a location they can call their own.

FEBRUARY 2013
Old School RuneScape is live, with players taking to it in their thousands to relive the nostalgia.

2008 — 2011 — 2013



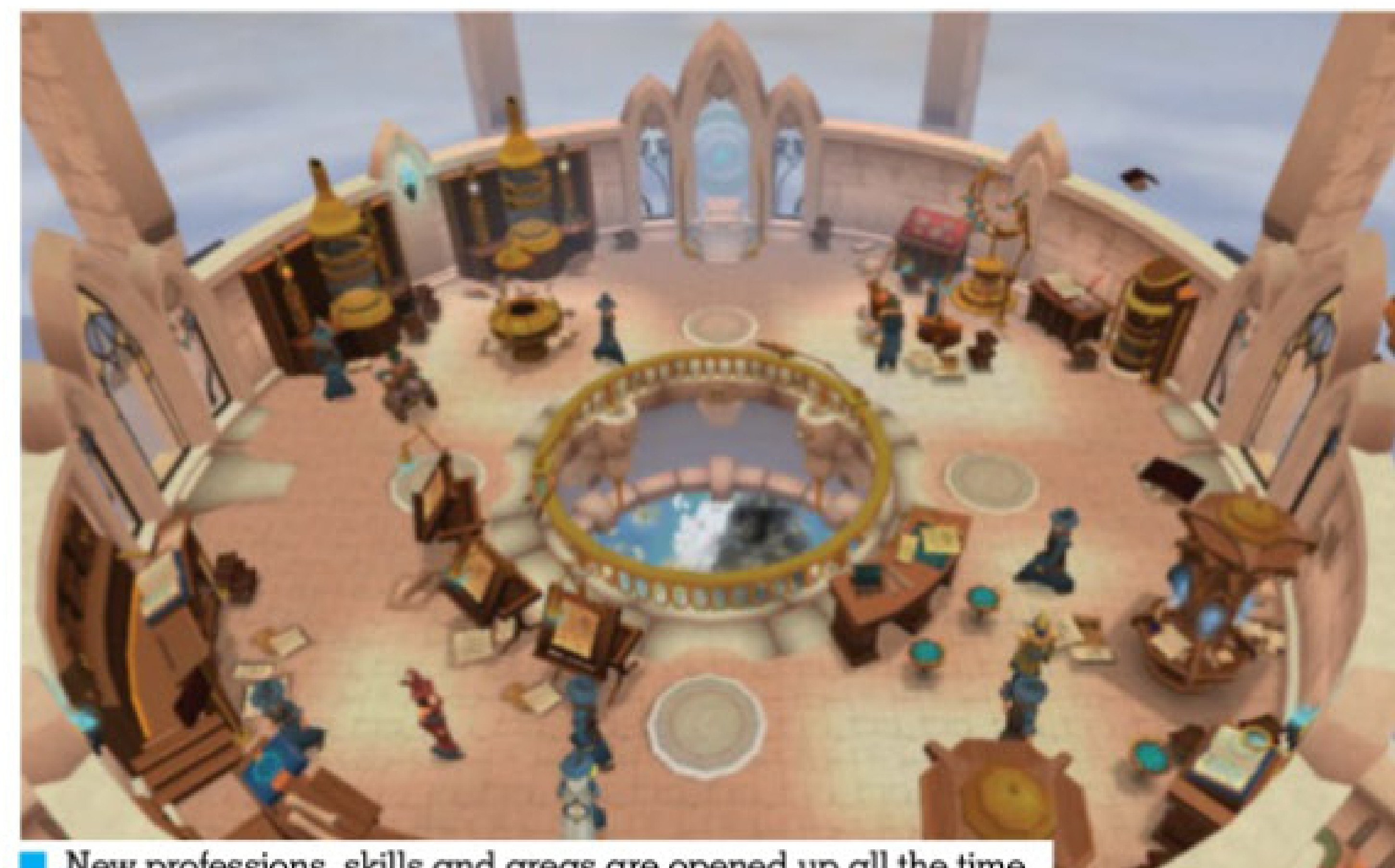
bereft of their own computers, needed a game that was quick to install yet compelling to play over multiple sessions. By making a game that appealed to themselves and their own needs, the Gower brothers had indirectly made something that would, as a result, draw in thousands more like them. It was the engine that powered it all that was *RuneScape*'s secret to success.

"It was homemade," says Ogilvie of *RuneScape*'s engine. "If we needed to change things, we could. All of our systems were bespoke and if we needed more, we just made more! Because the game client was so thin, any additions we did make could be done very quickly and with an almost unnoticeable effect to the download. Our server downtime would be minutes, at most, every week." This was another boon that appealed to the masses: there were no long, drawn out server maintenance and any problems that were discovered could be quickly resolved. It helped build a fanbase that became reliant on this consistency, and – as a result – the fanbase grew.

The demand for new content continued to grow, but *RuneScape*'s streamlined engine meant this wasn't such a grand undertaking like so many early MMOs. "We have always been about creating new content," claims Ogilvie of *RuneScape*'s approach to gameplay. "Our big selling point aside from the accessibility was (and still is) the rate of content updates to the game. We always looked forward to the new rather than reflecting on the old, which eventually caused us a few problems, having to dedicate lots of time on reworking older content." The type of content that was added was vast, too, not just a handful of new quests. Items, skill updates and many more were developed quickly and implemented even quicker to sustain the increasing demand from fans. "The rate of updates was full on, and the appetite from the players was immense, as they were expecting new content every single week." To Jagex's credit, that was a demand it more than aimed to meet.



The steady stream of updates meant there was always something new.

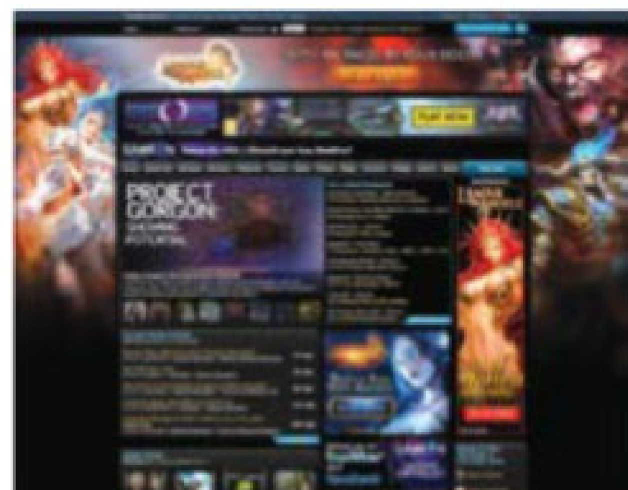


New professions, skills and areas are opened up all the time.



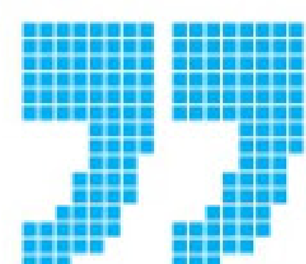
■ Though new art is created all the time, the original design sketches for the various beasts of *RuneScape* are still used as reference for this day.

WHAT THEY SAID...



Unlike most MMORPGs, Runescape doesn't give the illusion of listening to the players – Jagex actually does take user opinions into account

MMORPG.com



Because of this demand *RuneScape* became a varied game. Jagex was free to explore different ideas with each new update to see what would stick and what would fail. This led to a very freeform approach to development – at least in the early days – with design documents that were more "brief concepts" than traditional planning. For the early days of *RuneScape* and Jagex, it was more about working dynamically and fluidly to produce the content needed to satiate fans. It helped keep *RuneScape* fresh, but moreover it kept the problems to a minimum. "The limitations were pretty light too," explains Ogilvie, "creating the rich tapestry of themes and ideas that we see now." *RuneScape* has since touched on a wide range of design directions and themes, expanding on the medieval fantasy setting that remains core to the game even now.

■■■ *RuneScape* enjoyed a year of phenomenal success and with the player count rising, newly formed Jagex needed to look for funds. Initially it had been done so through in-game advertising, paid-for banners that helped pay for the servers to keep *RuneScape*. It soon became increasingly apparent that everyone involved was going to need to work on the game full-time to ensure the stream of content could be created. But advertising on the internet was becoming scarcer by the day; the online craze was waning and soon Jagex was not getting enough from advertising. In February of 2002, the model was changed, and *RuneScape* implemented a monthly fee: "the dotcom bubble burst and advertising revenue reduced considerably," says Ogilvie, "so the only alternative to closing the game was coming up with a subscription service with 'premium' content."

Though there were concerns that it would be widely despised, the team at Jagex knew that without the extra income it could provide the game could not continue otherwise. "Any risks were far smaller than the possible threat of the game closing completely. Nobody was sure how popular it would be, but over the first week there were enough subscribers to cover the costs, and to actually hire a full-time member of staff."

The march of content continued unabated and with it the numbers of subscribers. The addition of the monthly fee was a success, with fans turning up to enjoy the new locations, quests and items on a regular basis. If *RuneScape* has proven anything to the MMO world it's that if you can sustain your players with new content, then they'll continue to play, to subscribe and to stick around for more in the future. It's a hard challenge to face, and one that Jagex managed to handle ably with *RuneScape*. It didn't need to change anything or release huge expansion packs

OVER THE FIRST WEEK THERE WERE ENOUGH SUBSCRIBERS TO HIRE A FULL-TIME MEMBER OF STAFF

to draw in the crowds; it simply had to maintain the ones that were already playing. "Whilst I don't think we ever played it safe," Ogilvie tells us, "most of our updates focused around adding new content, rather than changing anything existing. Some of our largest increases in community size over the years have followed significant additions to the game. When we have made changes to existing content, small or large, it has the potential to cause friction with the community."

In later years it's this very approach that has seen many other MMOs fail. Even *World Of Warcraft* fails to appease its most regular and veteran players courtesy of the vast shifts in design that occurs with each expansion pack. *RuneScape* did not – and does not – need to change anything, simply provide *more*. Which made approaching *RuneScape 2* all the more daunting. In 2003, Jagex was considering an upgrade to the *RuneScape* engine; its early graphics were the game's weakest elements, and many knew it. Jagex intended to create a sequel – but rather than



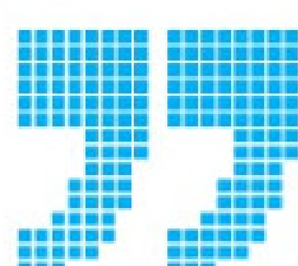
RuneScape has gone through several iterations and updates, being one of the few long-running games to keep up with its audience.

WHAT THEY SAID…



Despite the presence of some history and a fairly thorough mythology, the world is pretty damn generic and somewhat 'dorky' in its approach to the fantasy genre

jeuxvideo.com



cast aside all the work already done, it was decided this new version would be designed to simply replace the one that was already there. In essence is was a swap for improved visuals. It was a risk; the fans might not want to upgrade, or see this as an unnecessary change of direction: "We didn't want to split our community, but equally we didn't want to force migration over to *RuneScape 2*. The main challenge was getting players to understand that it was still the same game, it just looked and played a lot better, and gave us greater scope for content in the future."

The solution to the problem was elegant; provide players the opportunity to move everything over, and if there were those who didn't want to they could stay right where they were. "We had a grace period that allowed player to move their 'bank' from *Classic* to *RuneScape 2*," says Ogilvie, "but eventually they had to choose where it would stay. Getting players to decide which version they wanted to play was difficult – the promise of a better future versus the comfort of what they knew. It's the same challenge with any significant engine development or rework to a system. In addition, we didn't want to slow down our update rate too much, so it was a busy time for us."

On its release, *RuneScape 2* was named simply *RuneScape*, while its older version became *RuneScape Classic*. The uptake in this grace period was impressive, and hardly a surprise – the game was now better looking than ever, and it was futureproofed for fans. "We made it clear that new content would only be added to *RuneScape 2*," adds Ogilvie. "I found it fascinating to learn about features the players had grown to love and rely on versus those things in game we knew were – to us – badly designed and in need of improvement." The development of the two was symbiotic, with any new content also going into the new *RuneScape*. With its success and the large number of players moving to the upgraded version, all future content endeavours were moved onto the enhanced version of *RuneScape*, with "staff only maintaining and bug fixing *Classic*".

The new engine rolled out in March 2004, with only a month later Blizzard's own MMO *World Of Warcraft* being released. Though the viewpoints and art design differed, the visuals were comparable and it was clear *WoW* was going to shake the foundation of the MMO world. But *RuneScape* remained stoic in the face of Blizzard's behemoth. Its approach – to focus on accessibility over everything else – meant its fanbase had no interest in departing. Were there any concerned at Jagex about *WoW*'s release? "Surprisingly not," says Ogilvie. "Update frequency and accessibility were still our trump cards and actually our audience weren't that interested in *WoW*. I think it did affect the rate of new customers, but frankly we were struggling to hire staff and build new servers fast enough to deal with the rate we did have, which was still tens of thousands of new accounts every single day."

MUCH OF THE CONTENT WAS INSPIRED BY FORUM POSTS

Jagex had found success in the simplest of things; despite having a team of only 50 people it was still producing content faster than any other MMO on the market, and even the might of Blizzard wasn't able to compete. Its fanbase was loyal and *RuneScape*, it was clear, wasn't going anywhere. By this point there were millions of players, and as Jagex set about expanding into France and Germany it was only going to become tougher to maintain such a huge community of players. "Incredibly rewarding, challenging, exhausting and satisfying, all at the same time," explains Ogilvie when asked how the team handled such a large playerbase. "So many people with so many opinions might

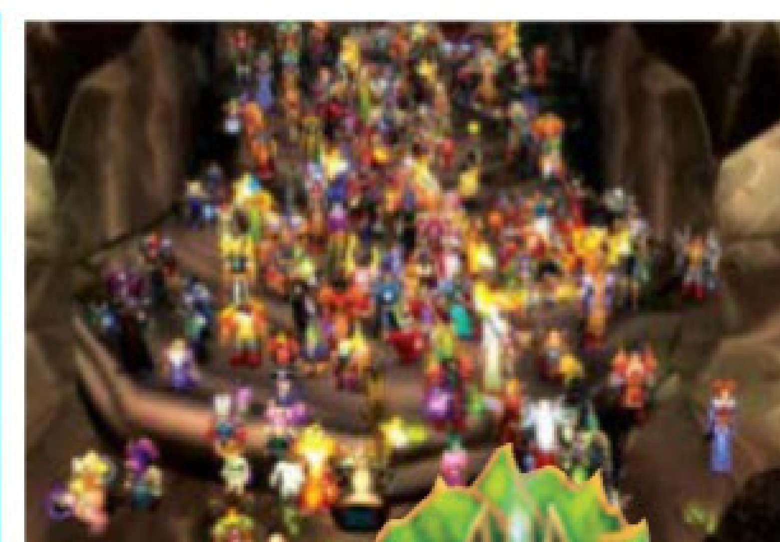
> GAMING EVOLUTION EverQuest > RuneScape > World Of Warcraft



One of the earliest examples of MMOs, *EverQuest* set the foundation for a lot of the core elements we'd come to expect from the genre



Blizzard's success with *WoW* was making it a world players wanted to explore with no boundaries, but making it accessible too



sound daunting, but with each opinion came an idea. So much of the content in the game was inspired by a forum post or an in-game conversation. Football managers often refer to the crowd as their 'twelfth man on the pitch' – our community is no different."

RuneScape is still going strong today, but controversy struck as recently as 2012 when it was announced that the game would be updated to feature microtransactions. It might be every gamer's most despised word – second only to 'season pass DLC', perhaps – but *RuneScape* fans felt particularly embittered by the news. Microtransactions had previously been described by Jagex CEO Mark Gerhard as a 'stealth tax' – so the news that the MMO would soon implement them became a point of contention for the outspoken community. "It was a new – and additional – business model for *RuneScape*, so we naturally had lots of reservations," says Ogilvie. "However, the introduction of microtransactions was a way for us to increase our investment in *RuneScape*'s development, raise its production values, and explore new technology. It certainly wasn't a reaction to the rest of the industry's move towards microtransactions, more a way of ensuring that *RuneScape* would continue to grow and evolve as it always has. It was a big change for us but actually it didn't result in a drop in subscribers. Of course, there were some in the community at the time who were reticent about the introduction of microtransactions, but over time they've seen that they don't fundamentally change the game they've always loved."

From its very inception, *RuneScape* has had a very core ideology running through it; to make it accessible to everyone and to produce content quickly and efficiently. It takes a lot to remain relevant in the MMO genre, but *RuneScape* does even after all these years. More than that, however, Jagex released *Old School RuneScape* in 2013, proving the worth of its original creation even with the announcement of an enhanced, modern equivalent in *RuneScape 3* (released in June 2013). Combined with *RuneScape 3* the player count across the franchise each month rests in the millions, but alone the original *RuneScape* – now known as a separate entity named *Old School RuneScape* – tallies up thousands upon thousands of players, with a daily average of between 10,000-20,000 simultaneous players. The industry's focus on technology often means posterity is rare, but Jagex has proven the worth of maintaining older servers.

Few games – least of all MMOs – can boast an active community more than a decade after its original release, but then this is a testament to the value it has kept on to all these years. But has the release of *Old School RuneScape* and its success informed Jagex of anything? "It's taught us that while as designers we might want to fix everything that appears broken in a game," explains Ogilvie, "people love that game and love its quirks and complexities. If anything, they want more like that, not less. Never underestimate the power of a comfort blanket."



CALL OF THE WILD

■ **THE WILDERNESS has had something of a chequered past. This was the collective name for the PvP zones implemented into every *RuneScape* server (outside of the later-added PvP worlds), and was a high-risk location where other players could fight one another. The winner of a PvP bout would be able to claim their opponent's items as reward, which meant it was a very difficult place to visit. As problems with bots and real-world trading began to rise, however, the Wilderness became a headache for Jagex, who didn't want to remove the PvP functionality but understood that its inclusion was giving the problems a place to fester. It's had a lot of development attention over the years, and had even been removed entirely at one point.**



■ *RuneScape*'s original graphics were derided, even at the time.

GAME CHANGERS
GOLDENEYE 007

Released: 1997 **Publisher:** Nintendo **Developer:** Rare **System:** Nintendo 64



GoldenEye became the N64's third best selling game of all time, with incredible critical acclaim and multiplayer appeal contributing to its 8 million sales.

More than just a movie tie-in, Rare's seminal first-person shooter rewrote the genre playbook and provided Nintendo's console with a multiplayer classic

ARRIVING DURING THE golden age of first-person shooters, Rare's *GoldenEye 007* stood out from the overcrowded PC scene, landing on Nintendo's doorstep in 1997 on a wave of critical hype and acclaim. Until this point, many dismissed console platforms as unsuited to first-person shooters, instead sitting behind their PCs engrossed in *Doom*, *Quake* and *Wolfenstein*. *GoldenEye* arrived with an appropriate bang, highlighting consoles as a viable FPS platform for the first time and contributing significantly to the Nintendo 64's appeal.

With Martin Hollis in the director's chair, the game was moulded by the same prolific collective that would be responsible for *Perfect Dark*, *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Conker's Bad Fur Day* further down the line. Rare was hitting heights that many developers would only dream of, and generated some of the best output of the Nineties. Members of the same team would later form Free Radical, responsible for the equally excellent *TimeSplitters* series.

From the more sedate beginnings of the Dam level right through to the dramatic conclusion atop a large satellite array, *GoldenEye* took you on a monumental journey, fighting your way through Soviet control centres, the streets of St Petersburg, the jungles of Cuba and what looks strangely like a reclamation site. The world that Rare built was a potent influence on first-person shooters that followed, and represented the first mainstream FPS with a truly international feel.

The film, released two years earlier, obviously influenced the game's design. Hollis and his team – thanks to the 64-bit power of Nintendo's machine – managed to achieve high levels of fidelity compared to the bog-standard output of the big movie licensing boom of the Eighties. Never before had there been a licensed game based on a movie that looked so much like its counterpart, and there haven't been many since then that have been as successful creatively or mechanically. Rare had access to set plans while developing, and due to this you can enjoy direct parallels with the film. It is still a joy to this day to jump from the dam at the end of the first level, for example – If you know the film, you'll be aware that it begins with Bond running and then performing the iconic bungie jump. In the game, however, there is an entire Russian compound that must be infiltrated

FOR ENGLAND, JAMES | GOLDENEYE OFFERED A DEEPER EXPERIENCE THAN MANY OF ITS PC COMPETITORS WITH THESE ELEMENTS



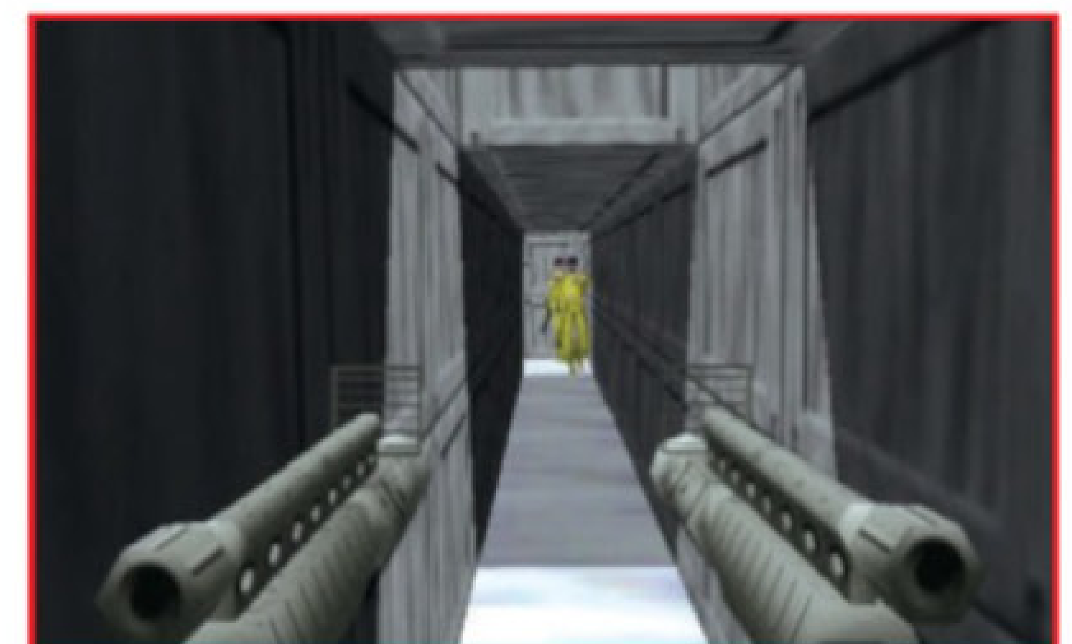
IMAGINATION

★ Martin Hollis and his team used the movie as a strong basis for the action in the game, but were unafraid to extend and adapt certain sections to enhance the experience. From being able to drop down into the bathroom in Facility to fighting Jaws in an Aztec temple, *GoldenEye* offers a refreshing take on movie adaptations.



LEVEL DESIGN

★ Ask anyone who played *GoldenEye* back in 1997 where the hidden body armour is in Cradle or where the RC-P90 is in Train, and they'll be able to tell you in a heartbeat. Rare's levels are diverse and memorable, borrowing directly from the film and expanding neatly on locations that the film brushed over.



WEAPONRY

★ Even now in the midst of the largest FPS movement in history thanks to *Call Of Duty* and *Battlefield*, *GoldenEye*'s array of weapons still stands out. This is no more apparent than when the 'All Guns' cheat is enabled, which not only provides you with every variety of firearm available naturally, but extras like a nifty taser.

before then. It almost gives the sense that the film begins in medias res – that by playing the game you're actually seeing the whole picture.

This is true with later levels too, thrusting Bond (impressively rendered to resemble Pierce Brosnan) into scenarios that were either only touched upon in the movie or entirely built for purpose. There are encounters in the Severnaya computer complex that Bond never visits in the movie, instead watching the facility be destroyed by an EMP blast from the GoldenEye satellite. And after protecting Natalya in Trevelyan's control centre towards the end of the game, you pursue the former 006 through some labyrinthine water caverns before eventually encountering him on top of the satellite array, in contrast to the film's simple jaunt in an elevator.

This willingness to adapt culminates in two secret levels that can be accessed after you've completed the game on Secret Agent and 00 Agent difficulties respectively. These levels – Aztec and Temple – showed a wider knowledge of James Bond, pitting Bond against two old nemeses in the form of Jaws and Baron Samedi. The Golden Gun makes an appearance. The temple is based on *The Spy Who Loved Me*. Aztec is actually Hugo Drax's jungle base from *Moonraker*. It shows a true love for Bond that few games have ever managed, allowing the more fantastical and tongue-in-cheek elements of the franchise to creep in from time to time.

NEVER BEFORE HAD THERE BEEN A LICENSED GAME THAT LOOKED SO MUCH LIKE ITS COUNTERPART

KEY FACTS

- *GoldenEye* was intitially intended to be an on-rails shooter in the same vein as *Virtua Cop* and *Time Crisis*, but thankfully this was reconsidered.
- Several levels were designed with the film sets in mind. The best examples of these can be found at the end of the Dam level, the bathroom and bottling room in Facility, the interrogation and library areas of Archives, and the Cradle level where you fight Trevelyan.
- It is actually possible to control the game using two controllers at once, allowing for first-person control similar to that which you would find nowadays.

By adding non-linear objectives, Rare further broke the first-person shooter mould, tasking you with approaching levels in a more considered manner on higher difficulties. On Agent difficulty these objectives are fairly basic, but on Secret Agent and 00 Agent it became quite testing. What's interesting is the lack of hand holding – certain objectives are either hidden away or more technical in nature, requiring a higher level of care than *GoldenEye*'s FPS forbears.

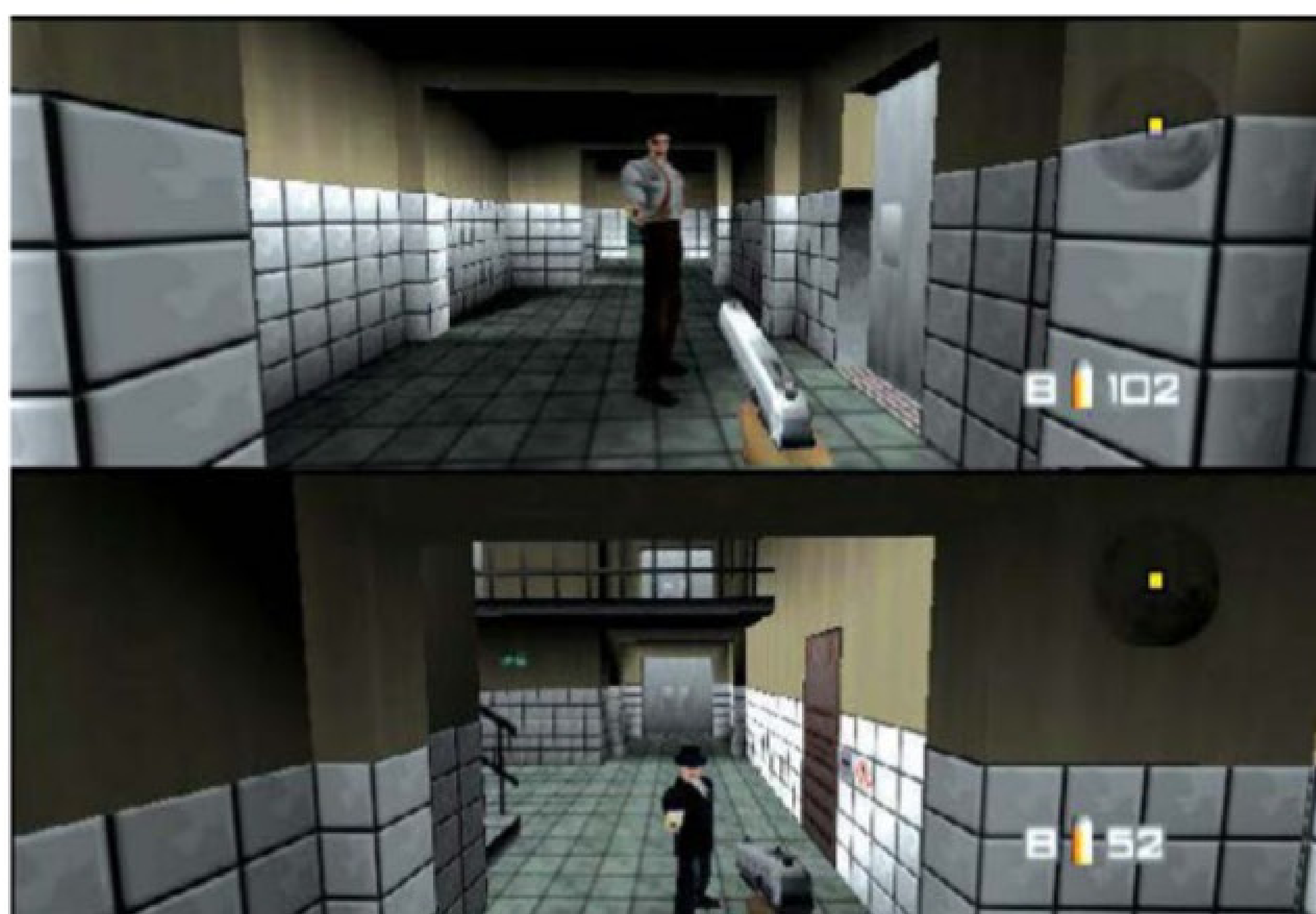
It all purveys production values that weren't really found in first-person shooters at this time, and that's where you can easily connect the dots between *GoldenEye* and modern shooters like *Call Of Duty* and *Battlefield*. Protecting Natalya in the control room, pursuing Trevelyan in the Cradle level, rescuing hostages on board the frigate – these elements were unexpected from a licensed game in 1997, and are common tropes of the genre today.

But *GoldenEye*'s legacy isn't just found in contemporary first-person shooters; it represents an industry shift. Would we have such a huge FPS player base today if it wasn't for Rare's masterpiece? Probably, yes, but it's likely that it would have taken longer to catch on. It also arguably represents the pinnacle of movie licensing. *GoldenEye* is still prevalent in the hearts and minds of many players today, and for that it is worthy of respect, reassessment and, of course, a playthrough if you get the chance.

GAME CHANGERS

GET AHEAD IN MULTIPLAYER

WE MAY BE AROUND 17 YEARS TOO LATE TO THE PARTY, BUT REGARDLESS, **GAMES™** IS ON HAND TO GUIDE YOU TO CERTAIN VICTORY IN GOLDENEYE MULTIPLAYER MODE



CHARACTER SELECT

■ The first step on the path to multiplayer success is carefully picking your character. It is worth noting that in some circles, selecting Oddjob is considered to be foul play, Auric Goldfinger's deadly yet diminutive henchman standing considerably shorter than other selectable characters. It's highly recommended that you avoid Jaws – as the tallest, and wearing a highly visible white shirt, he is easy to spot and hit. Try and pick a character that's a little more nondescript, such as Trevelyan, who stands at an average height and whose black clothing blends in nicely with the darker backdrops of some of the maps such as Temple and Caves.



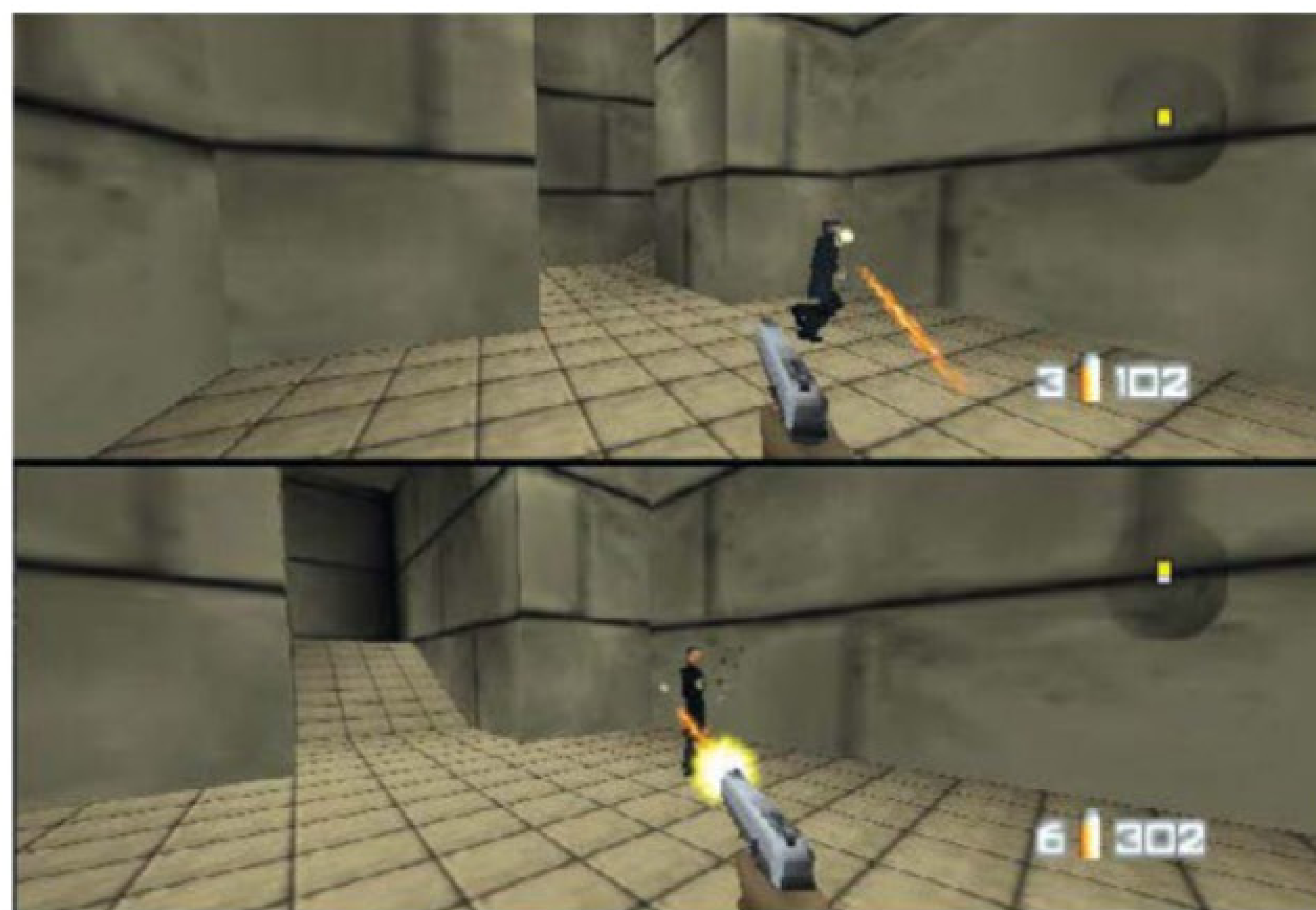
LEARN YOUR MAPS

■ Much like any modern first-person shooter, learning *GoldenEye*'s map layouts is essential if you want to embarrass your friends at multiplayer. As well as getting to grips with the basic layouts, it's also worth noting where secret passages and hidey-holes are. Several of these secret pathways are key to success, such as the vents that can be walked through in Complex and the sliding walls that appear in Temple, Library, Basement and Archives. These are all useful for the stealthier player, but if you fancy being offensive-minded and fighting from a cover-based position, then get yourself up on the raised platforms in Complex.



ARMOUR UP

It's worth noting that body armour can be found on each of the maps, and finding it and occupying areas near it are surefire ways to get ahead. Refer to step two – body armour is usually located in hidden areas, and so try to be experimental as you traverse the maps. Body armour essentially doubles your health, and in a one-on-one firefight with an enemy it can be the decider.



THE GOLDENEYE STRAFE

Never underestimate the power of the strafe. As far as techniques go this is imperative by holding the C-Left and C-Right buttons you can strafe with ease, making it much harder for your opponents to hit you. Try and be unpredictable; walking in a straight line is a very modern concept – get crazy with strafing and watch the bullets whizz harmlessly past you.

BE DISHONEST

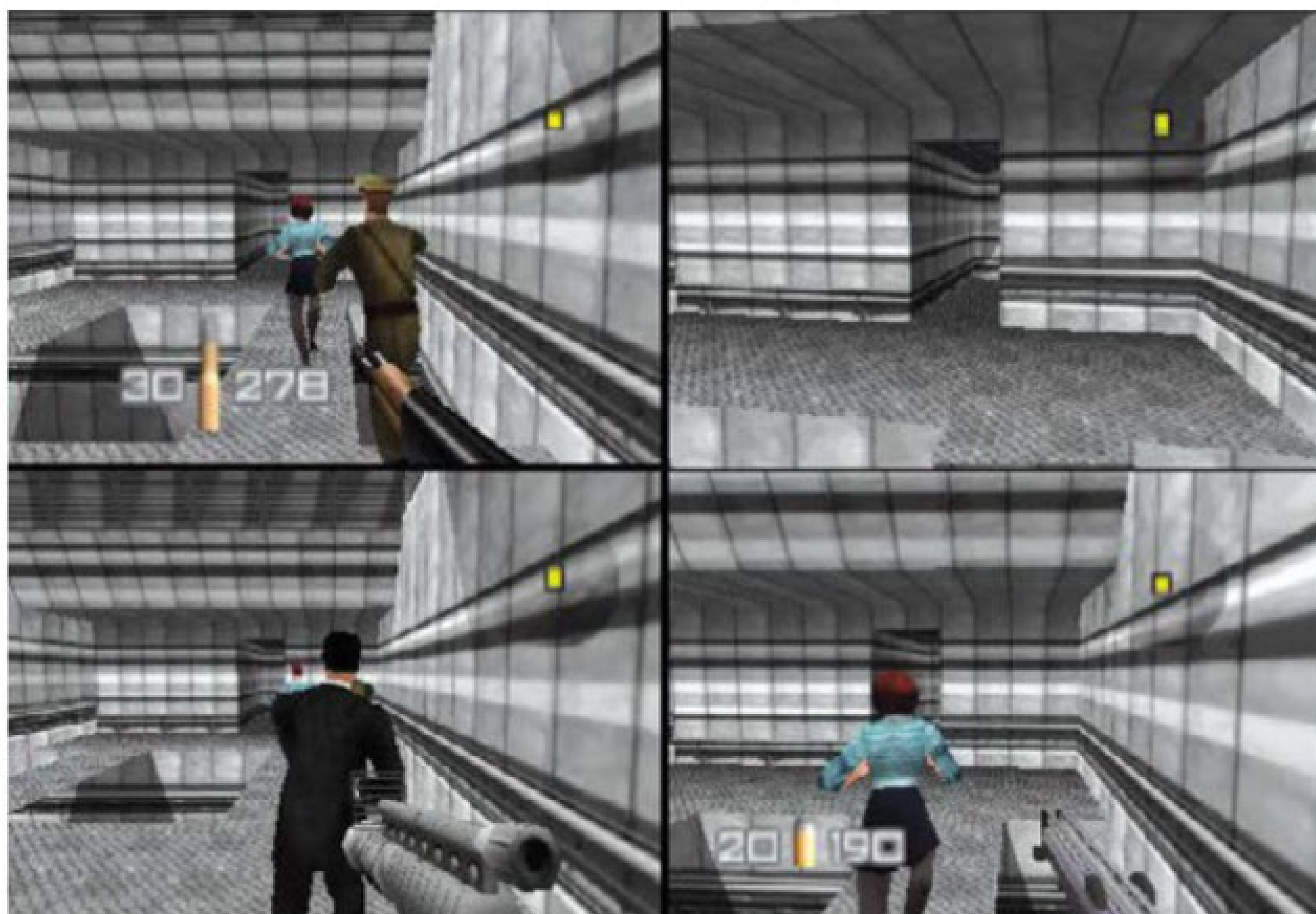
When all else fails, just cheat. You're playing with friends after all – it's quite likely that they'll forgive you. To do this effectively, select Oddjob quickly and start the game before your opponents know what's happening. Alternatively, beat the game to unlock extra characters in advance, allowing you to select the Moonraker Elite – she is as short as Oddjob, and with a non-specific name, is easier to get away with.

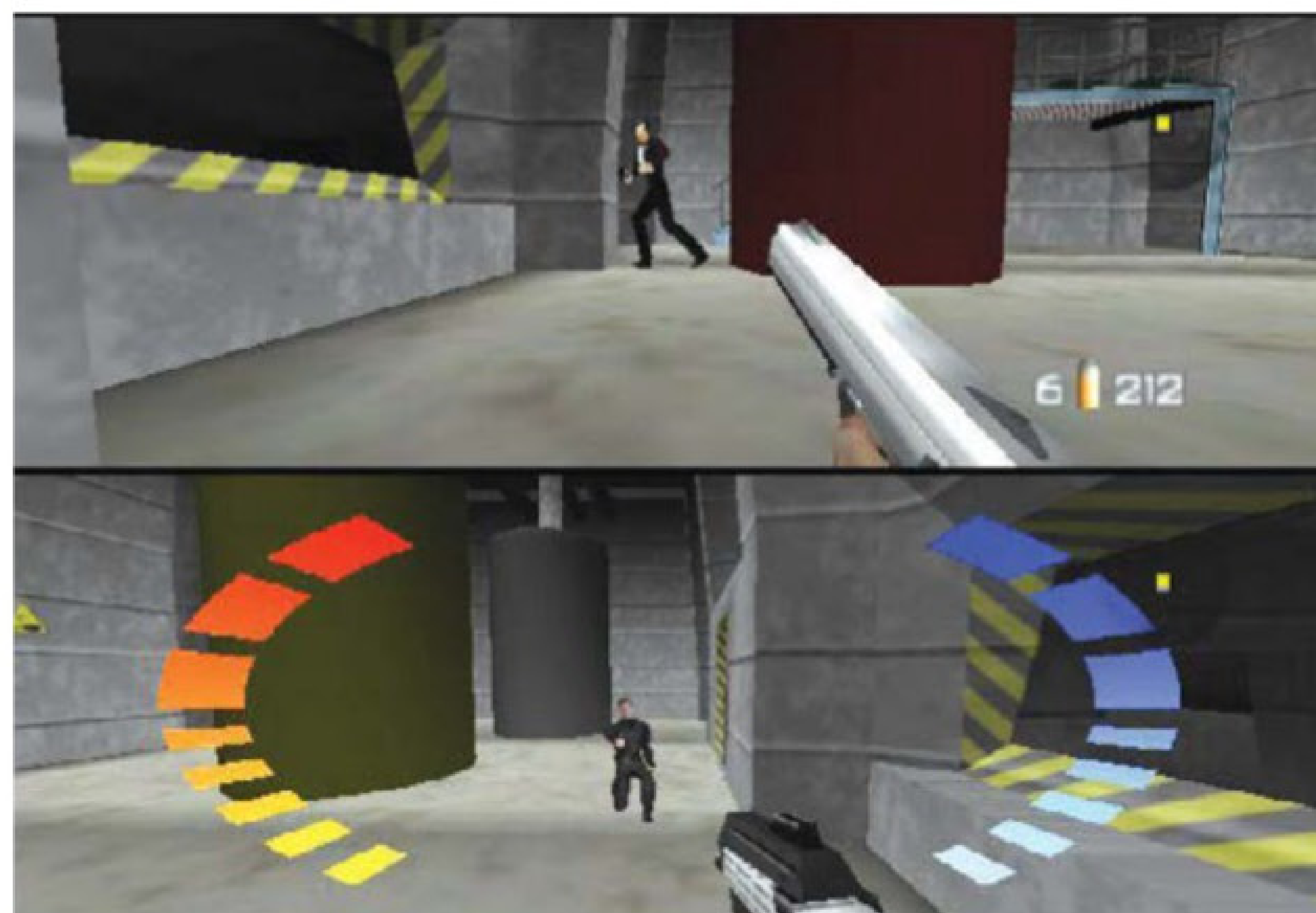
The key technique for robbing a win with any character, though, can be easily achieved once in the game. Hold down R to aim and then rock back with C-Down to crouch. From this position, it is near impossible for other players to hit you without using the cumbersome aim button or crouching themselves. Get down low, find the best weapon you can and then unleash Hell.

Caught out doing both of the above? Don't worry; your greatest weapon is sight. Why waste your time looking at your own portion of the screen? Instead, you should be looking at every screen other than your own. No radar? No problem. If you've learned the maps well enough, a quick glance at an opponent's screen will enable you to ascertain their position and move in for the kill.



Above: Shorter characters always had the upper hands in a game of *GoldenEye*. With vertical aiming a concept that was relatively uncommon at the time, characters like Oddjob or Moonraker Elite were a fast track to success. Below: By much the same standard, crouching with a standard character was also a great way of frustrating your opponent.







BEST BOSS

SUPER MARIO RPG: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN STARS SNES [SQUARE] 1996

■ Let's address the glaring inaccuracy first: Bundt isn't even a Bundt cake. While we're at it, he also appears to be alive, has a face and can fire a series of razor-like snowflakes. But more importantly, Bundt personifies the tone of Square's brief dalliance in the *Mario* canon: an idiosyncratic creation rich in humour that bridges the Nintendo's licensed characters with Square's design sensibilities. The boss battle itself is rather elementary. You fight against a pair of French chef stereotypes who slowly begin to realise that the cake they're protecting is moving, running away when it springs to life. Then you fight the three-tiered wedding cake until all that's left is its base sponge. While it's not the most challenging or technical encounter, the unusual, charismatic nature of the boss battle and Bundt's unique design make it one of the most memorable in the history of Mario adversaries.



GAMING FIRSTS

WE LOOK BACK AT THE PIONEERING DEVELOPMENTS IN GAMES HISTORY, LEFT IN THE SHADOW OF THEIR SUCCESSFUL PEERS



OXO

THOUGH THERE HAD been precursors which used computer technology to play games, *OXO* is the first game to draw graphics on an electronic monitor as is fundamentally required of videogames – though it still utilised printed output in order to instruct the player and provide updates on the status of the current game. Written as part of Alexander S Douglas' PhD thesis, *OXO* employed a room-sized EDSAC computer at the University of Cambridge to play noughts and crosses, with moves entered on the dial of a rotary telephone. Impressively, the computer could play a full game without human aid.



TENNIS FOR TWO

DEVELOPED BY WILLIAM Higinbotham as a demonstration for visitors to the Brookhaven National Laboratory in the USA, *Tennis For Two* delivered on the promises of its title by allowing two players to play a simple simulation of tennis, which ran on a Donner Model 30 computer using an oscilloscope display. Though it looks similar to *Pong* in simulated screenshots, seeing it in action quickly reveals that the game is a surprisingly accurate side-on representation of the real sport. Utilising this viewpoint instead of the top-down one seen in *Pong* and its variants allows the game to simulate gravity, and it does so quite well – the ball arcs convincingly over the net as it's hit by the unseen players.

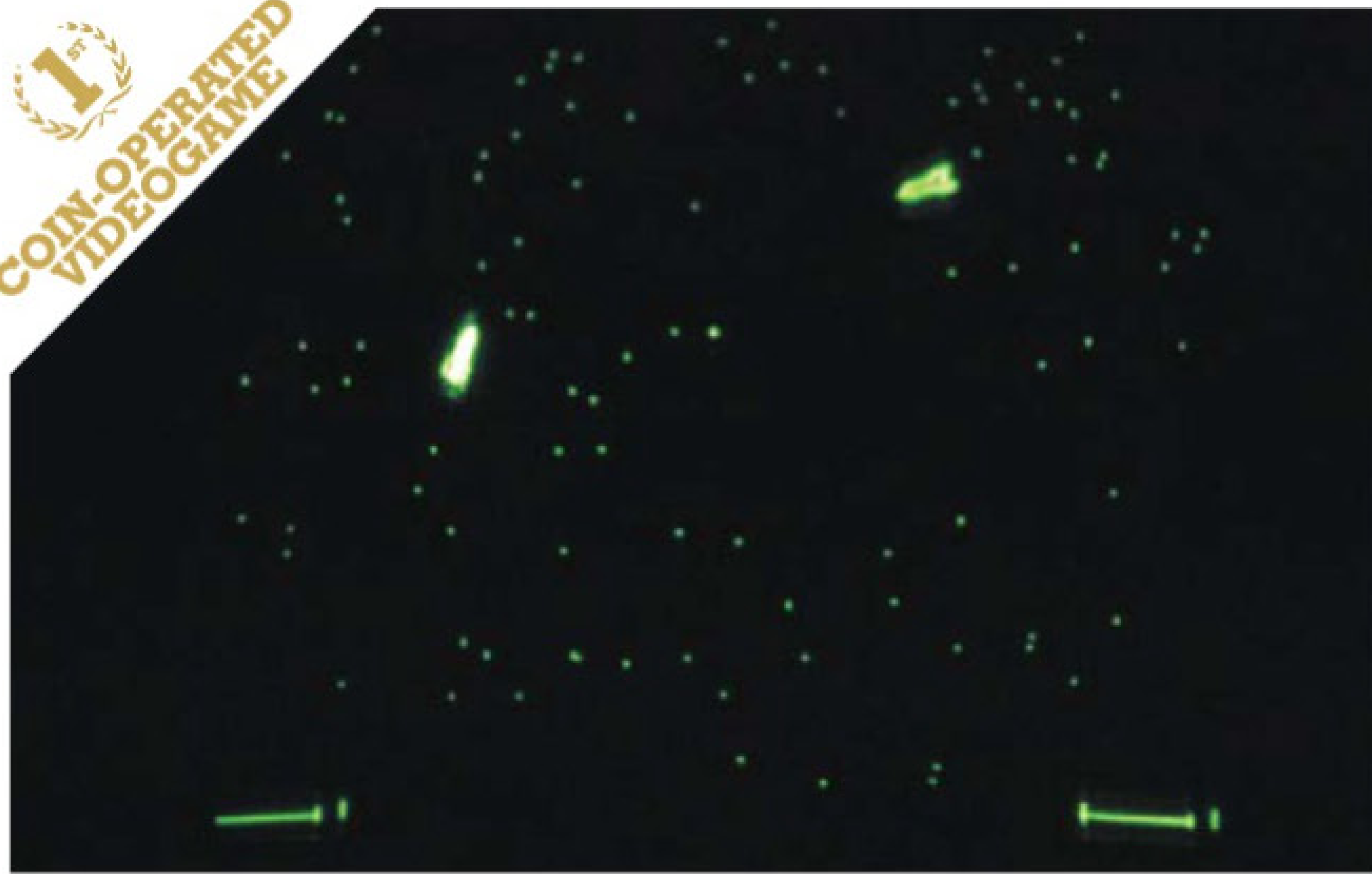
1952 ··· 1958 ··· 1962



SPACEWAR!

CONCEIVED AS A way to demonstrate the power of the PDP-1 computer, *Spacewar!* was conceived by MIT students Steve Russell, Martin Graetz and Wayne Wiitanen. The game features two spaceships – each controlled by a single player – that must not only destroy each other but also avoid colliding with the star at the centre of the screen, which constantly influences movement with its gravitational pull. It's a relatively complex design, and was reportedly adopted by PDP-1 manufacturer DEC as a test program due to its extensive use of the hardware.

Aside from introducing the concept of destroying opponents with projectiles, the major legacy of *Spacewar!* lies in its status as the first videogame to receive wide distribution. The game was ported to other machines during the Sixties and served as an inspiration to other coders, who produced a variety of variations upon the game. Two of those would go on to be milestone developments in their own right, as we'll cover later.



GALAXY GAME

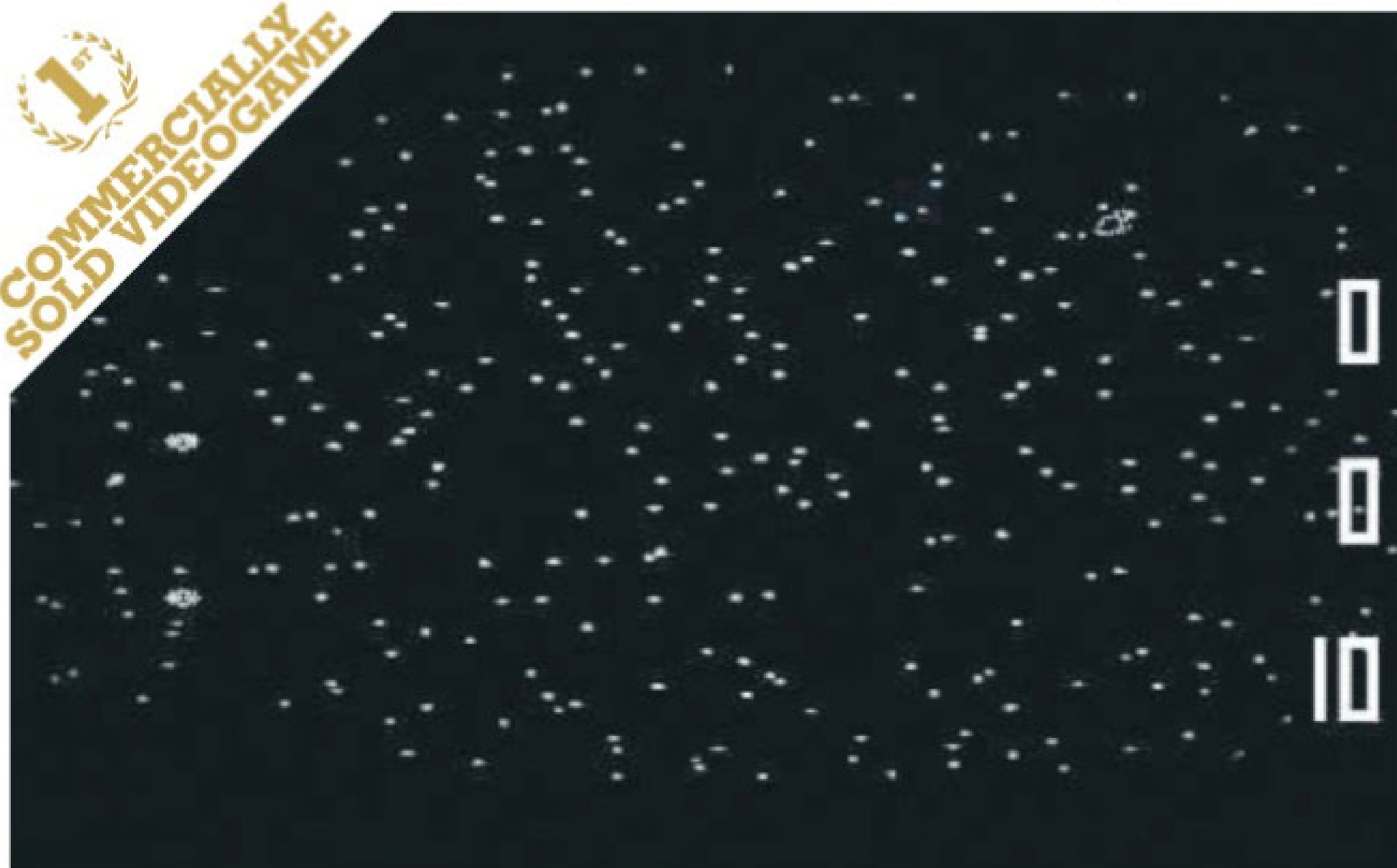
A MERE NINE years after *Spacewar!* had been released, Bill Pitts and Hugh Tuck harnessed an incredibly expensive PDP-11/20 computer to allow Stanford University students the opportunity to play the game at their leisure. In doing so, they provided the world's first coin-operated game. At a price of 10 cents per game (or 25 cents for three), the hardware cost required the game to be played around 200,000 times to break even. That milestone was probably reached – the system was upgraded to handle multiple simultaneous games in 1972, and would remain a fixture on campus until technical issues retired it in 1979.



MAGNAVOX ODYSSEY

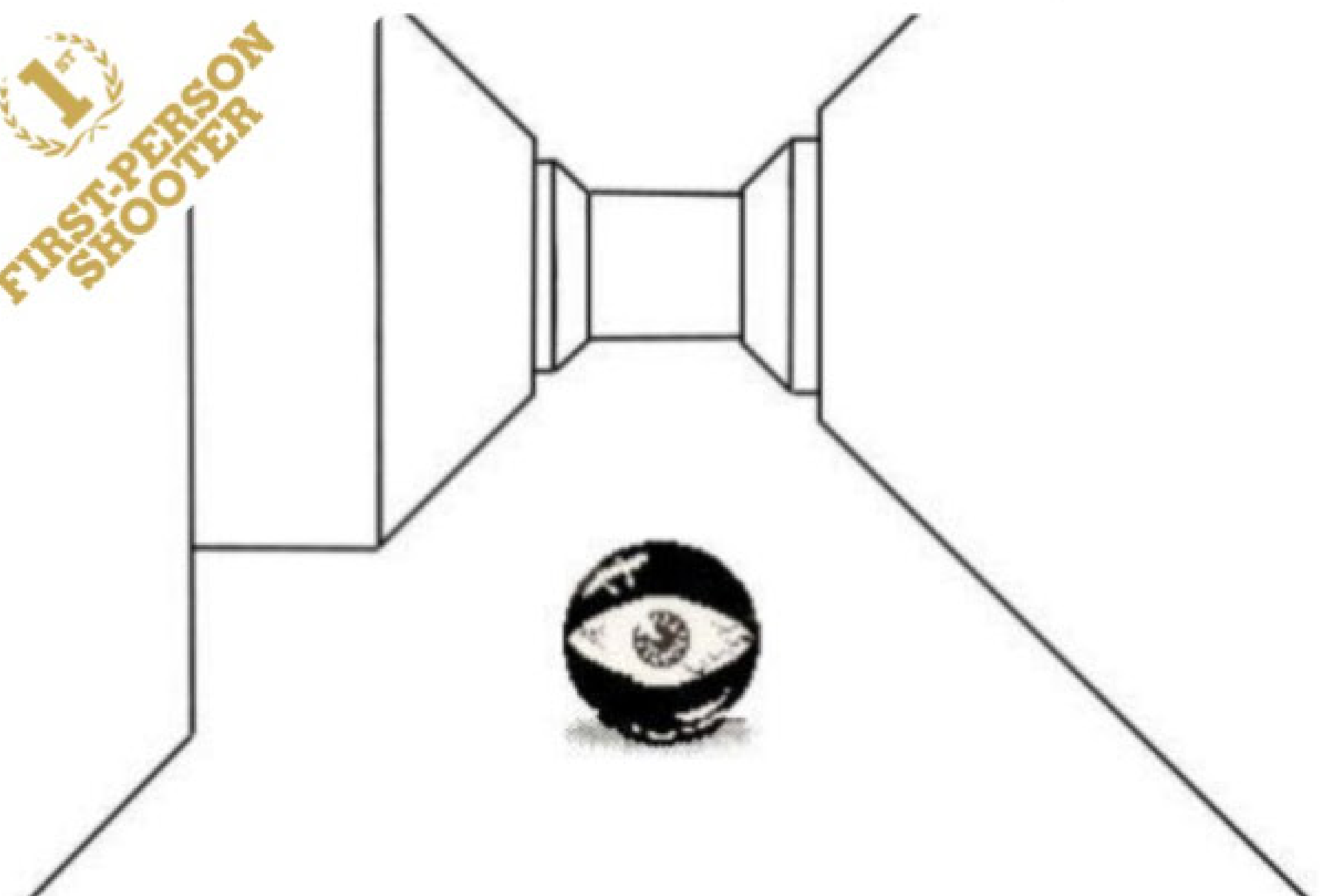
"BROWN BOX" MIGHT not be the most enticing codename of all time, but Ralph Baer's invention would bring videogames into the home for the first time ever. Prior to the release of the Odyssey, videogames had been confined exclusively to research facilities and the select few public places that bought *Computer Space*.Unlike later consoles which used programmable ROM cartridges, the Odyssey's cartridges connected jumpers and logic circuits to enable pre-programmed games. With limited graphical capabilities and no sound, players had to rely on screen overlays and keep score for themselves. Magnavox was acquired by Philips in 1974, and enjoyed enough success with the Odyssey to release a successor, known in North America as the Odyssey 2 and in Europe as the Philips Videopac G7000. The company left the console market during the 1983 market crash.

1971 · 1971 · 1972 · 1974



COMPUTER SPACE

WHEN NUTTING ASSOCIATES released *Computer Space*, it became the first company to ever try to sell a videogame. *Computer Space* was an attempt to take the *Spacewar!* phenomenon and transplant it into commercial venues such as bars, where pinball tables and other coin-operated amusements had seen success. However, general audiences weren't familiar with the concept of videogames at all, and failed to grasp the game, which entailed controlling a rocket ship and avoiding enemy fire. Failure did not prove to be much of a deterrent – the designers of the game, Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabney, went on to found a little company called Atari. You may have heard of it…



MAZE WAR

WHEN STEVE COLLEY decided that his maze navigation program was too dull, his solution would make him an unwitting pioneer of videogaming. *Maze War* took the first-person perspective of the maze program, and added the ability to see other users, represented as floating eyeballs, and shoot them. Movement was simple and tile-based, but it was indisputably a first-person shooter. What is astounding about *Maze War* is the sheer number of features it pioneered. It was the first networked game, offering peer-to-peer network gaming across a serial cable and later being adapted for play over ARPAnet, the forerunner to the internet. Crafty players also realised that their client versions of the software could be modified, thus allowing them to cheat.

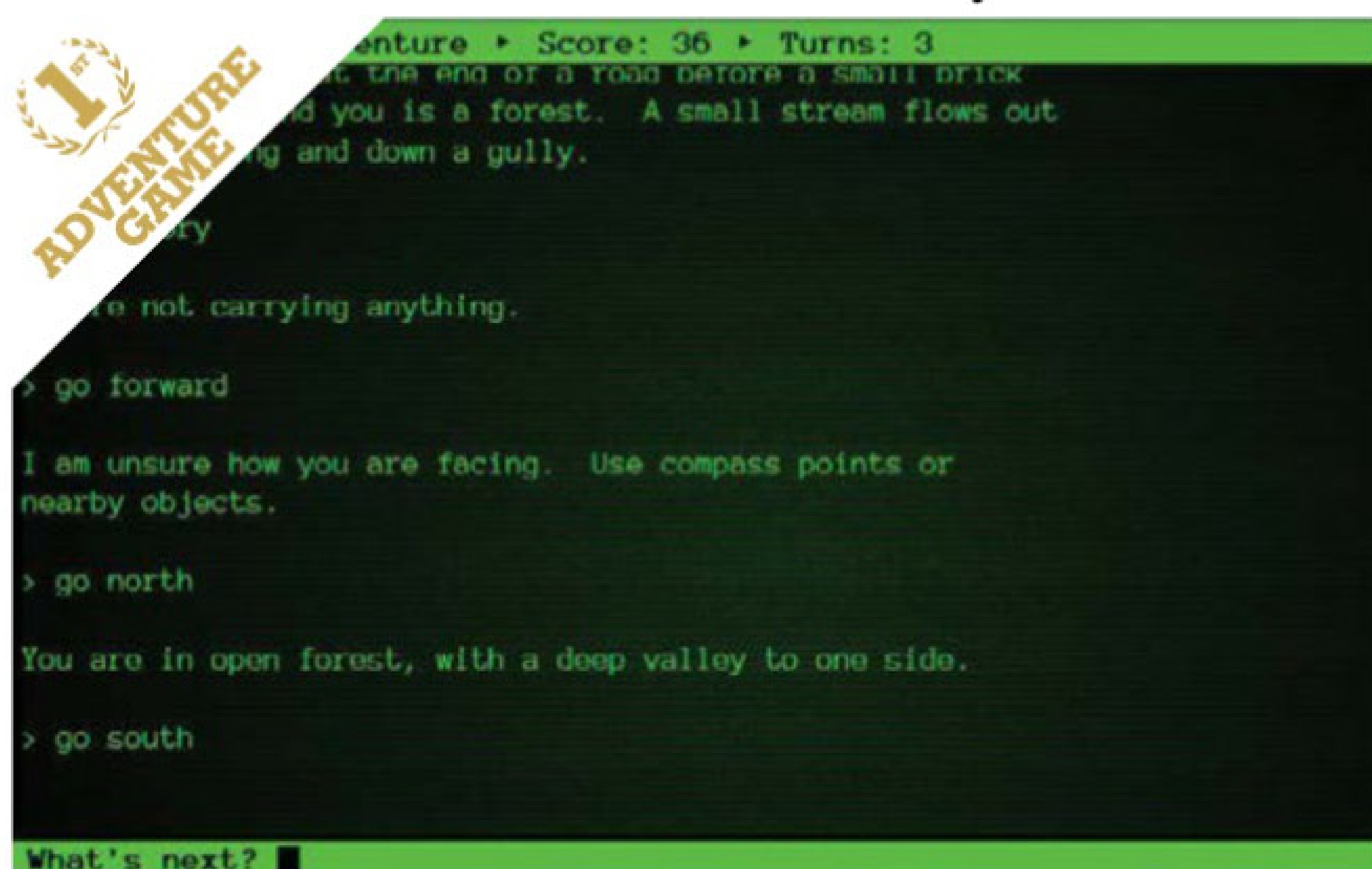


HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMP

1976

SOMETIMES, IT'S POSSIBLE to get something right the very first time. Such was the case with Sega's *Heavyweight Champ* – not only was it the first game to feature hand to hand combat, it introduced the common side-on perspective that has persisted through the genre's popularisation and subsequent move to 3D in the Nineties. Less enduring was the control system, which gave each player a boxing glove. These could be raised and lowered to determine the height of punches, and thrust inwards to strike. Confusingly, Sega would reuse the name for a 1987 arcade game and 1991 Master System game.

1977



COLOSSAL CAVE ADVENTURE

BORN OF WILL Crowther's desire to create a game to enjoy with his daughters, *Colossal Cave Adventure* reflects his background as a caver as well as a professional coder. The game featured some light fantasy elements, which would be ramped up when Don Woods discovered the game at Stanford University. Woods significantly expanded Crowther's original game, with more locations, a greater vocabulary and the inclusion of objects. Many games can trace their lineage back to *Colossal Cave Adventure*, thanks to its pioneering text adventure format and the inclusion of Tolkien-inspired creatures that tie the game to the emerging RPG genre.

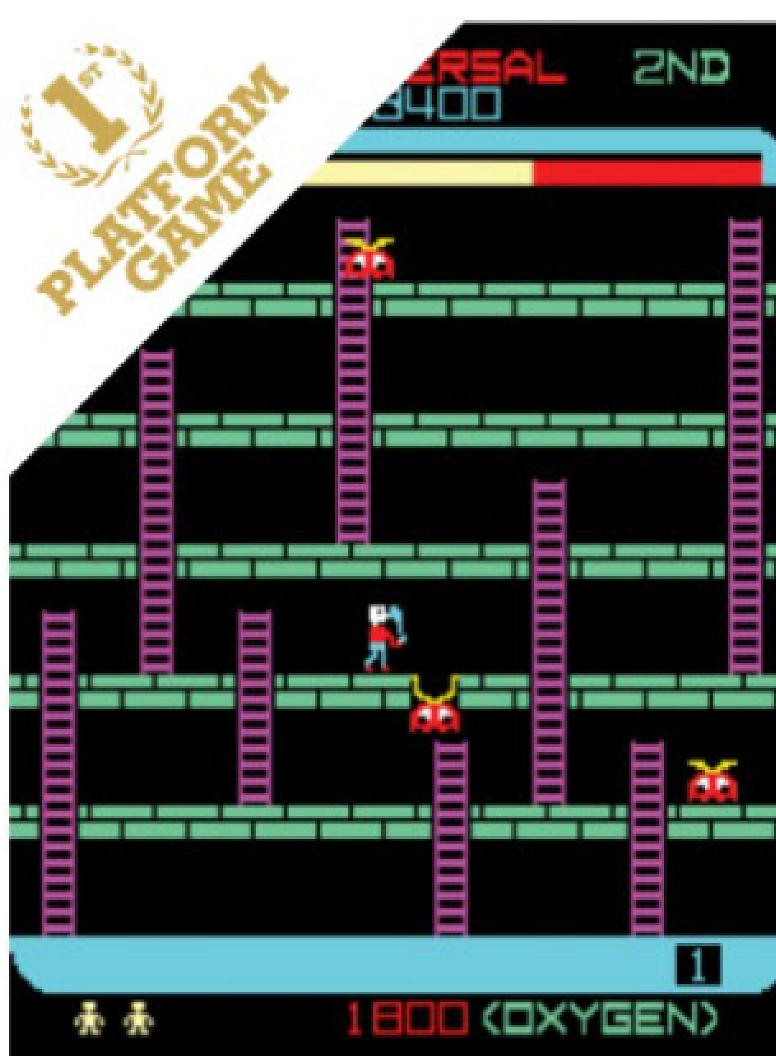


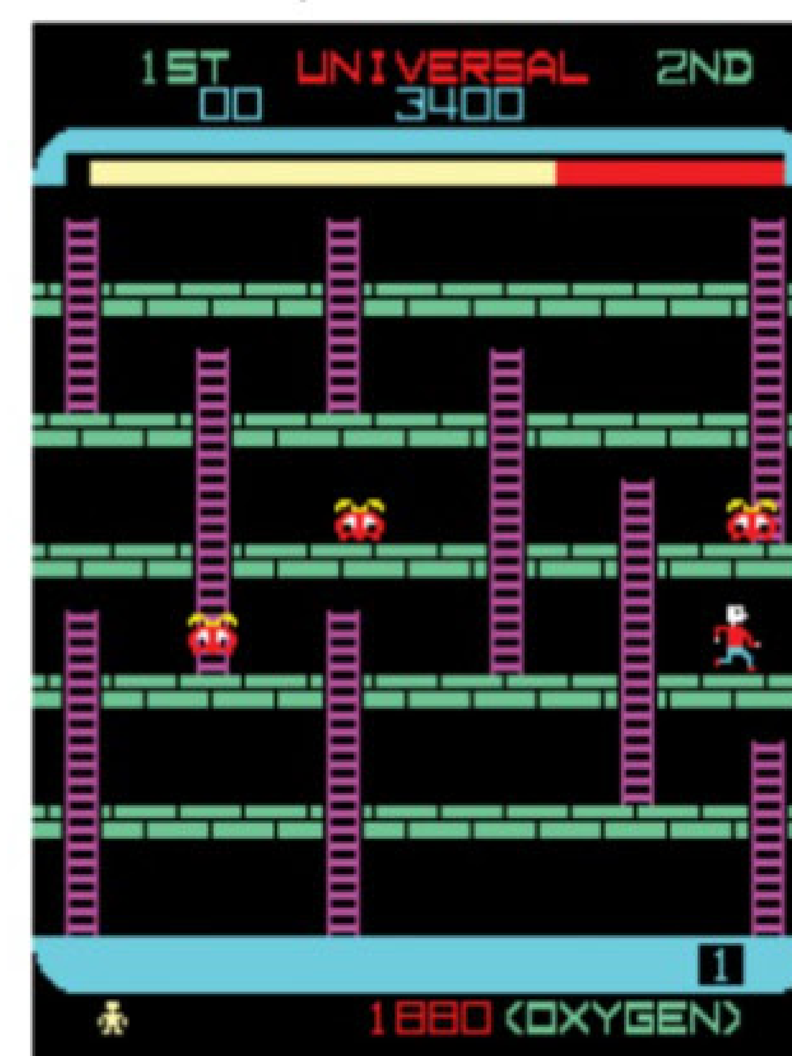
SPACE INVADERS

1980

ONE OF ATARI'S key advantages over its rivals in the console market of the late Seventies and early Eighties was its ability to bring home the arcade games people loved. But when the *Space Invaders* phenomenon swept the world, it was Taito reaping the rewards – until Atari decided to break new ground by licensing the hit game. Proving the power of brand names, *Space Invaders* turned out to be the first killer app in console gaming. People didn't just buy the game – they were buying consoles just to play it, with the Atari 2600's sales reportedly quadrupling following the release of *Space Invaders*. Within a year of release, it surpassed two million sales – prior to that point, no stand-alone game had managed to even sell a million.

1980





SPACE PANIC

HERE'S AN INTERESTING fact for you: in Germany, platform games are typically called "jump and run" games. Amusing, as the first platform game didn't involve jumping at all. Universal's *Space Panic* doesn't allow the player to jump while they attempt to trap enemy aliens, but it does provide ladders to allow players to move between platforms – a common means of conveyance in early examples of the genre. Looking back at *Space Panic*, it's easy to be struck by the fact that genres can evolve from their early designs very quickly. Just a year after the game's release, *Donkey Kong* revolutionised the genre by allowing the player to jump between both static and moving platforms. As the result of Nintendo's monster hit, a platform game that doesn't involve jumping seems ridiculous today.

SOFTPORN ADVENTURE

1ST VIDEOGAME TO FEATURE SEXUAL CONTENT

WARFARE AND VIOLENCE came to videogames early, but sex came a little later. On-Line Systems' erotic text adventure was specifically marketed at adults only, but wasn't tremendously sophisticated – as you might expect from the game that inspired the creation of *Leisure Suit Larry*. The game was predictably controversial – it was largely ignored by the specialist press but highlighted by *TIME* magazine, causing hate mail to arrive at On-Line Systems. However the game also sold well, partially as a result of the controversy – reportedly, retailers would order other On-Line Systems games to mask the true intent of their orders.

1981

1981

COMMODORE VIC-20

1ST COMPUTER TO SELL A MILLION UNITS



COMMODORE FOUNDER JACK Tramiel has been quoted as wanting to sell computers to the masses rather than the classes, and the VIC-20 was a breakthrough in achieving this. The machine was aggressively positioned at retail, being sold at an affordable price through discount retailers and toy stores, supported by adverts starring William Shatner which touted the machine's advantages over consoles. This ensured mass market success, while enthusiasts were drawn to the machine's surprisingly capable hardware. The VIC-20's success would signal the start of a process which saw stronger manufacturers pulling ahead, reducing the number of competitors in the hotly-contested Eighties home computer market. It was also the first widespread format that allowed users to create their own games, a prominent trend in Eighties gaming. It was a short-lived success, though – the VIC-20 was quietly discontinued in 1985 as it was eclipsed by its more popular successor, the Commodore 64.

1983

1ST RELIGIOUS VIDEOGAME



THE MUSIC MACHINE

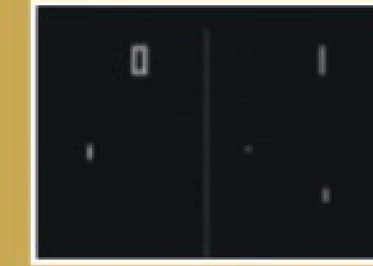
DEVELOPED BY SPARROW for the Atari 2600 and sold exclusively through Christian book stores, this game accompanied an LP of the same title and plays much like *Kaboom!*, an Activision hit of the era. Though it is an early example of an attempt to promote beliefs through a game, the religious message is relatively light-handed compared to later examples such as *Bible Adventures* – instead of catching bombs, you catch representations of qualities such as patience, faith and love. Due to the unusual distribution method, the game is now a rarity which fetches prices of up to $5,000 at auction.

FALSE FIRSTS

The hardware and software wrongly credited with pioneering achievements

PONG

False Achievement: First videogame



Pong is very definitely not the first ever videogame – Atari's Nolan Bushnell has stated on record that he had seen a similar game running on the Magnavox Odyssey, though he claims not to have thought much of it. However, *Pong* is still very much the game that launched an industry – though it wasn't the first commercially released videogame, it was the first commercially successful one.

ATARI 5200

False Achievement: First console to use analogue sticks as standard



While every home console since the Nintendo 64 has included an analogue control stick as standard, they had been used sporadically since the early Eighties. The Atari 5200 was the first high profile console to use such a device, but an earlier example is known: the 1292 Advanced Programmable Video System, designed in 1976 by German manufacturer Radofin, licensed throughout Europe.

GAME BOY

False Achievement: First handheld console



When handheld gaming finally came of age in 1989, Nintendo was there leading the charge with the Game Boy. But while the primitive technology can fool players into thinking it was a pioneer, the real beginning came in 1979 with Milton Bradley's Microvision, a handheld console featuring interchangeable cartridges. The black and white LCD screen, the most commonly malfunctioning part of the system, had a very low resolution of 16 x 16.

NINTENDO 64

False Achievement: First console to include four controller ports



While it was nice to enjoy *GoldenEye 007* and *Mario Kart 64* without having to dig out a multitap, Nintendo's console wasn't the first to allow more than two players to compete. The Atari 5200 had four ports in the early Eighties, and prior to that the Bally Astrocade introduced the feature. The long-forgotten pioneer was developed in 1976 by Midway, then the videogames division of Bally Manufacturing.

CHUCHU ROCKET

False Achievement: First online console game



While the Dreamcast was the first console to support online play out of the box, modem peripherals had been available for many years prior – even the Atari 2600 had such an item, though it wasn't used for competitive gaming. The XBAND modem, released for the SNES and Mega Drive in 1994, was the first such peripheral to offer competitive console gaming and did so across a variety of titles.

THE RETRO GUIDE TO...

GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS

Capcom's ghoulish franchise has been terrorising gamers for nearly 30 years. With the season of the witch now upon us, it felt like the perfect time to return to the franchise

WHEN SIR ARTHUR set off to rescue Princess Prin Prin at the beginning of *Ghosts 'N Goblins*, little did he know that his quest would continue for a further three decades. Despite being widely (and correctly) regarded as one of the toughest arcade games of its time, Capcom's game nevertheless struck a chord with gamers, who loved its gothic styling and hard-as-nails gameplay. Created by Tokuro Fujiwara, *Ghosts 'N Goblins* has a sense of epic adventure, helped in no small part by the scrolling map that shows your progress as you start each new life. An arcade sequel quickly followed before Capcom took the series to various home consoles, where it has stayed ever since. Join us as we grab our trusty lance, check we're wearing our favourite underpants and prepare to tackle one of Capcom's most challenging franchises…





GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS 1985

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

We'd argue that *Ghosts 'N Goblins* has received its hellishly difficult reputation because most people's experience has been with the stupidly tough NES conversion. The arcade original, while challenging, is nowhere near as fiendish, but can still make you weep in places. Known in Japan as *Makaimura* (Demon World Village), it starts off with Sir Arthur's love interest Princess Prin Prin being kidnapped by Satan. The fearless knight that he is, Arthur sets off to rescue his beloved, armed only with a suit of armour and an endless supply of lances.

While many popular platformers of the time were full of day-glo colours and cute characters, the world of *Ghosts 'N Goblins* is more ominous, featuring graveyards, decayed cities and lava-filled caverns. Arthur's enemies range from ghosts and demons to zombies and man-eating plants, and a single touch from any one of them causes Arthur to lose his armour, leaving him to run around in just his boxers. A further hit sees the hapless knight comically disintegrate into a pile of bones.

Fortunately, Arthur was far from defenceless, having a handy jump and the ability to pick up a range of weapons, from quick-firing daggers to slow firebrands. You'll need these many weapons, as Capcom's game has one of gaming's biggest screw-yous. Upon reaching the final boss, you discover he's an illusion, causing you to replay the entire game again to get the real ending. Thanks Capcom, thanks a bloody lot.



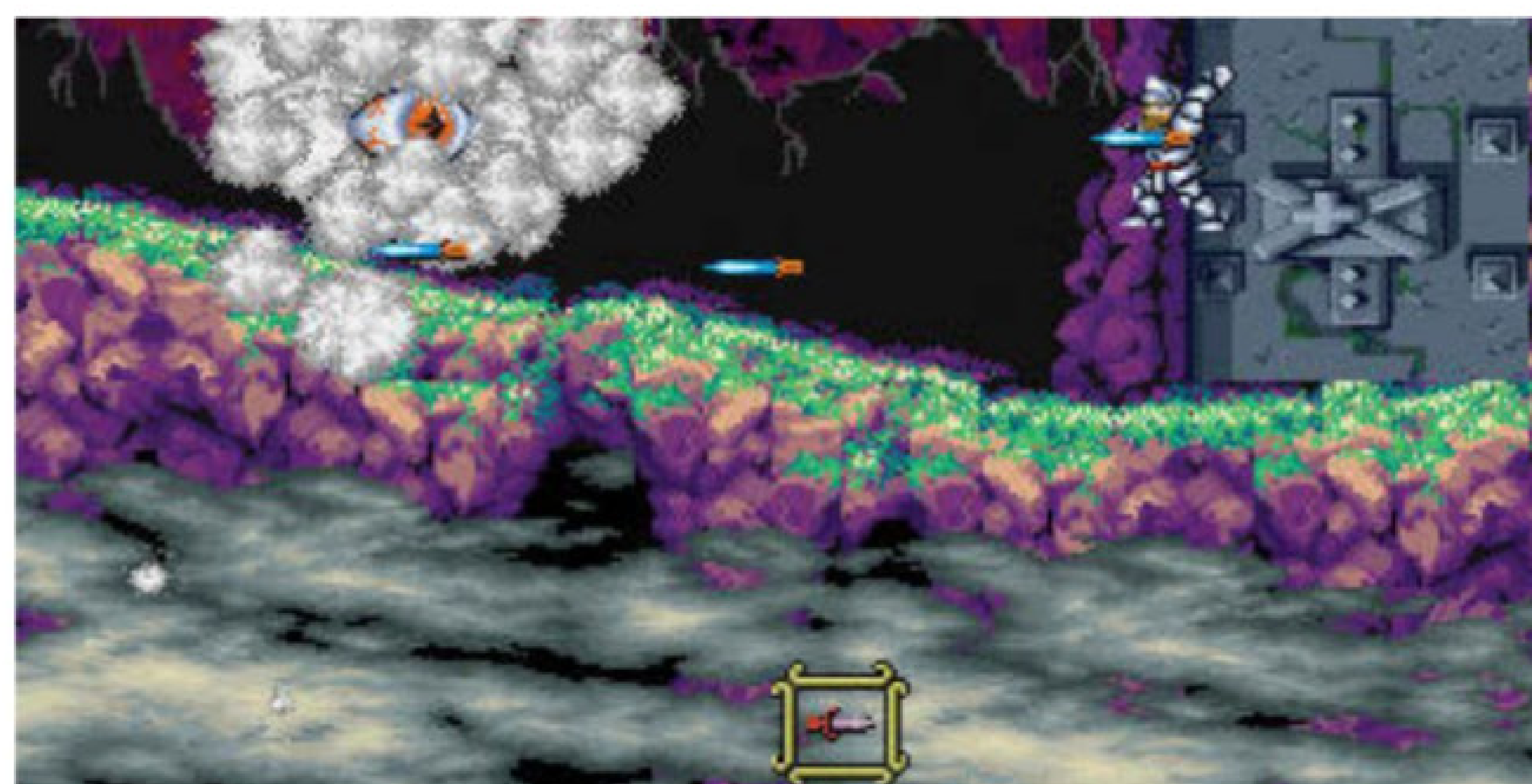
GHOULS 'N GHOSTS 1988

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Capcom's sequel was powered by its new CPS-1 board, which allowed more impressive graphics. Arthur and his foes are larger than the original game, while animation is also greatly improved. The game itself plays very similarly to the 1985 original, meaning Arthur is still leaping and dodging his way through a host of treacherous environments.

Things are made slightly easier this time around, mainly due to Arthur's new ability to fire directly above and below him. It sounds like a throwaway mechanic, but the sheer number of enemies allows Arthur a certain amount of crowd control. Chests also make their first appearance in *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*. Many will contain new weapons or armour (which could be powered up by holding down the fire button), but a few house annoying wizards. If you don't kill him quickly enough, Arthur will get turned into a variety of creatures, including a slow old man and a defenceless duck for a limited period of time.

Like *Ghosts 'N Goblins* before it, Capcom's sequel was ported to numerous home systems of the time and became extremely successful. It was to be the last arcade game for the series, however, with Capcom turning its eye to the increasingly popular home consoles.





GARGOYLE'S QUEST 1990

SYSTEM: GAME BOY

Capcom's first console game in the series ignored Arthur in favour of one of his most famous antagonists, the gargoyle Red Arremer (or Firebrand, as Westerners will know him). It's an interesting concoction, featuring the side-on platforming of the past two games, but with a RPG-style overworld. Firebrand can talk to other monsters, buy items and even have random encounters.

It's the platform sections where the game really shines, however, delivering a new style of gameplay due to Firebrand's ability to cling to vertical surfaces. He can also breathe fire and hover for a brief period of time, which is handy, as there are plenty of hazards. Like *Metroid*, you're initially given access to limited abilities that are enhanced over time, but Capcom's game lacks the freedom of Nintendo's, being a very linear experience. It's interesting, but is let down by its annoying difficulty and poorly placed enemies.



GHOULS 'N GHOSTS 1991

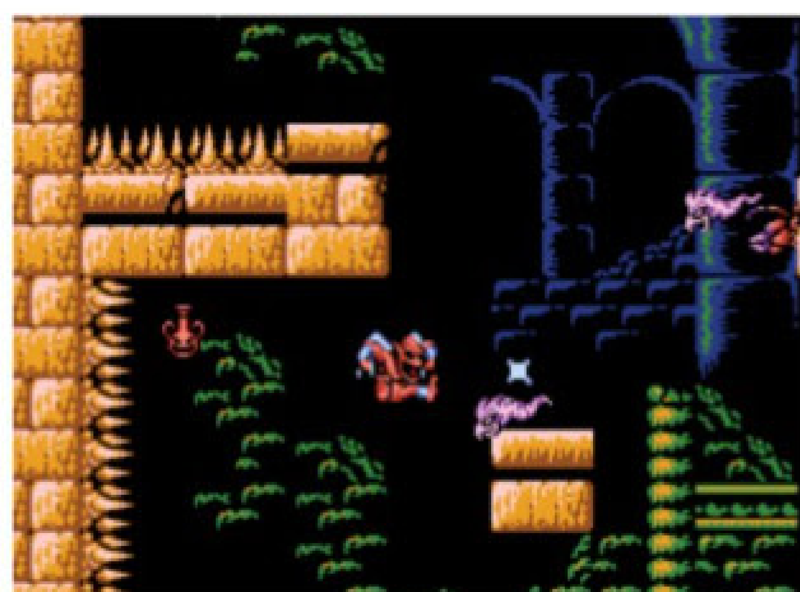
SYSTEM: SNES

SNES owners didn't receive an arcade port of Capcom's sequel. They were instead treated to this rather magnificent exclusive, which many feel remains the best game in the series. In many respects it channels *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*, but everything is on a far more impressive scale. The level design is superb, featuring ghost ships, rolling seas and movable landscapes, while there are plenty of impressive effects on later stages.

The bosses are equally magnificent, being full of variety. It remains hard, but the difficulty feels better balanced than the first two arcade games. The level design is equally improved, requiring you to search every single inch of a stage in order to find its hidden chests.

In terms of gameplay enhancements there are armour upgrades, and a variety of new weapons and shields. By far the biggest difference, however, is Arthur's new double-jump ability, which allows you to change direction on the second leap – which can greatly affect how you tackle certain areas of each stage. It's all wrapped up with rich presentation and an incredible orchestral soundtrack. It was later released on the Saturn and PlayStation as part of a compilation, albeit without the small amount of slowdown found in the SNES original.

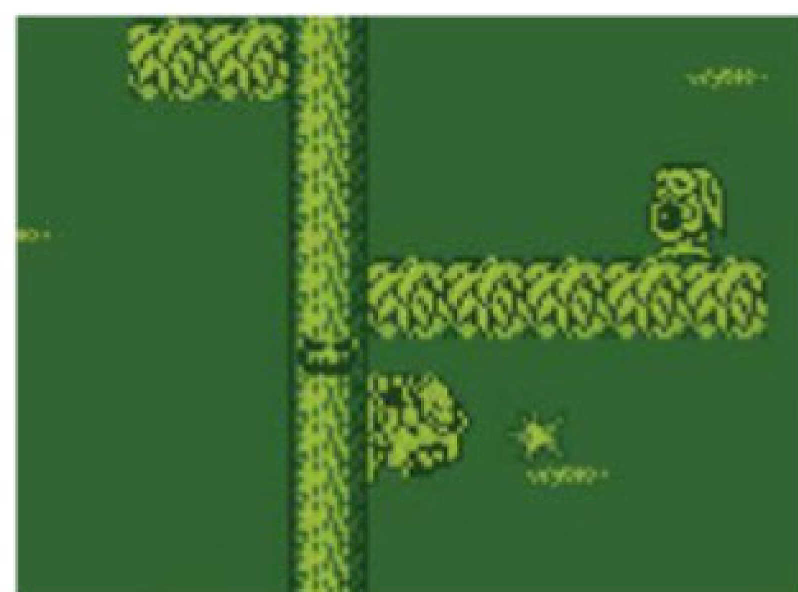
"THE BOSSES ARE MAGNIFICENT, BEING FULL OF VARIETY"



GARGOYLE'S QUEST II 1992

SYSTEM: NES

Capcom's sequel benefits massively from being on the NES, with great cartoon visuals, larger playing areas and some truly snazzy music. It retains the same gameplay, but the overhead game world has been sped up and the random encounters removed, making it easier to navigate. The level design is also stronger, and random enemies are less frequent than before. It remains tough, but the biggest annoyance is its password system due to Capcom shying away from battery save.



MAKAIMURA GAIDEN: DEMON DARKNESS 1993

SYSTEM: GAME BOY

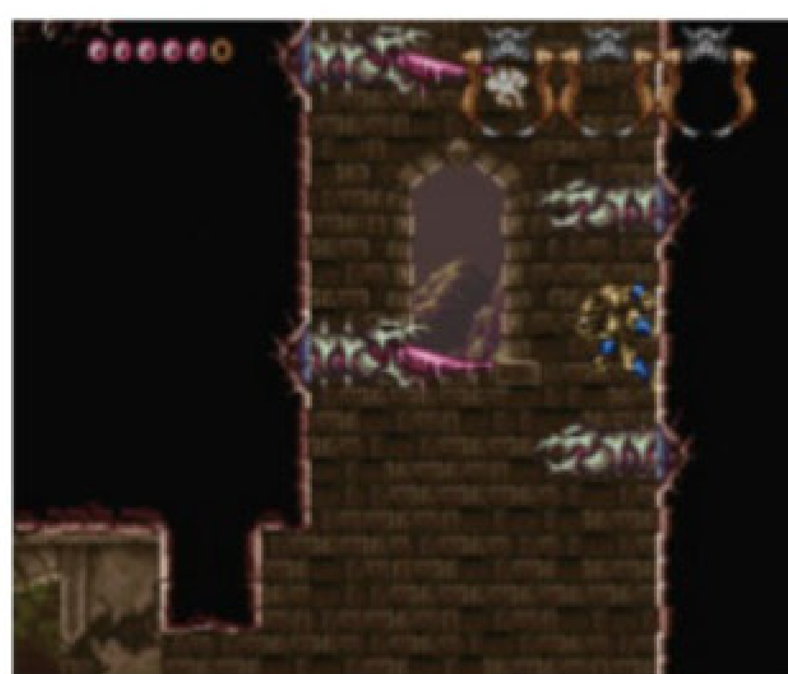
While this is technically a port of the NES game, we've decided that it's worth mentioning for a couple of reasons. Its planned Western release was cancelled, and it actually improves on the NES game by adding two additional sections that couldn't be included. It's vastly superior to the Game Boy original thanks to the more chunky visuals and the same well-constructed level design of the NES game.

DEMON'S CREST 1994

SYSTEM: SUPER NES

Capcom harnessed the power of the 16-bit SNES to create a superb final *Gargoyle's Quest* game. The biggest change is that the overhead sections have been swapped out for an amazing Mode 7 map, allowing Firebrand to tackle stages as he sees fit. Firebrand can now fly for as long as possible (on a straight plane), which makes the game easier and greatly opens up the gameplay. Additionally, he can turn into other gargoyles – upon unlocking the relevant power – that enables him to do anything from fly in any direction to survive underwater. There are also talismans to uncover, which grant further useful abilities.

Like *Metroid*, certain areas open up once you've uncovered certain abilities, meaning there's quite a lot of visiting previous levels, which you'll want to do so you can gawp at how amazing they look. Boss fights are the highlight of the game however, featuring immense bosses with devious attack patterns that stay just the right side of challenging. What a pity then that a lack of interest in the game at release means it now goes for stupid money on auction sites.





ARTHUR TO ASTAROTH NO NAZOMAKAIMURE: INCREDIBLE TOONS 1996

SYSTEMS: PLAYSTATION, SATURN

This is quite possibly one of the oddest releases in the *Ghosts 'N Goblins* family tree. Capcom farmed out production to Magical Formation, who essentially made a macabre version of The Incredible Machine. Each stage sees you presented with a number of different objects from the *Ghosts 'N Goblins* universe and a selection of additional items that are used to solve the on-screen puzzle. You might need to guide Arthur to a tasty ham, cause a coffin to fall on a demon's head, or simply reach the required exit. There are a large number of items, and each one can often be flipped and manipulated in order to achieve your goal. Get everything in place, start the machine and see if you've created the correct combination. It might not have much in common with the core series, but the animated sprites are delightful, while the retooled music is lovely to hear. In fact the only real downside to Incredible Toons is that the Japanese language barrier means it's not always easy to work out what you should be doing at the start of each stage.



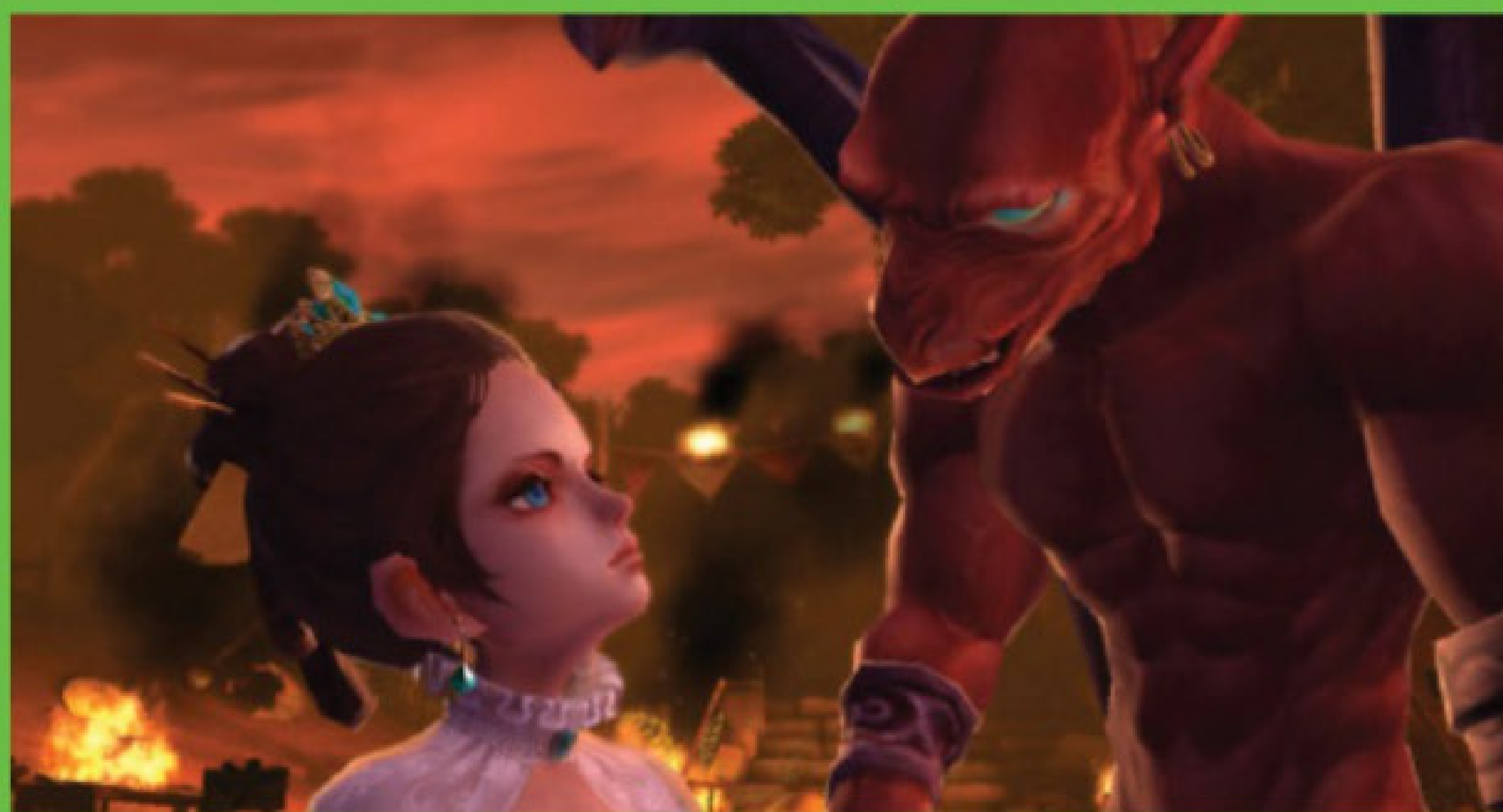
LOST TREASURES

The many appearances of Arthur and friends

There aren't many *Ghosts 'N Goblins* games that haven't been released, but these two are interesting, mainly because they both try to take the series online. *Makaimura Online* was originally planned for PC, Xbox, GameCube and PS2, and was first announced in 2003. It was re-imagined in December that year with more cartoon-like visuals, and was set to include the likes of Arthur, Princess Prin Prin and Firebrand as playable characters. It quickly sank without a trace though.



Capcom tried to re-energise the series in 2008 with *Magyechion Online*. Created by Korean developer Seed 9 Games, it received several beta tests and was eventually released in Korea, China and Taiwan in 2012. At one point in 2013 it was placed on Steam's Greenlight page as a free-to-play game called *Ghosts 'N Goblins Online*, but was taken down after Capcom said the page placement was a mistake. It's a shame that it's unlikely to hit the West, as it looks like an interesting take on the series.



MAKAIMURA FOR WONDERSWAN 1999

SYSTEM: WONDERSWAN

This is arguably the most frustrating game in the franchise. Despite its name, it's a brand new entry in the series, and the only main game to not have the involvement of original creator Tokuro Fujiwara. It's also exclusive to Japan due to the WonderSwan's limited appeal. While it features a few new ideas, like rapid-fire weaponry, it's let down by overly complicated jumping sections and frustrating enemy placement. All in all, it's a pretty poor effort that even hardcore fans of the series will find hard to recommend.





MAXIMO: GHOSTS TO GLORY 2001

SYSTEM: PS2

Maximo has quite an interesting back story, as it was originally planned for the N64. With the console under-performing, Capcom moved the project to Sony's PS2. The end result is a surprisingly entertaining 3D platformer that reinvents the ghoulish shenanigans of Capcom's popular series, but comes with a number of issues.

The biggest one is the camera. Like many early 3D games, it has a mind of its own, which makes certain platforming sections a real nightmare to navigate. Enemies are also insanely tough to defeat, meaning it won't be long before you're prancing around in your undies. The save system is also an issue, however. It requires you to pay 100 coins every time you save or switch levels, which makes paying for power-ups extremely hard. It's a pity these elements are so annoying, as *Maximo* is a gorgeous-looking game that plays at a slick pace and has a surprisingly robust and entertaining combat system. It's certainly not terrible, but an authentic remixed version of the original arcade turn doesn't make up for the lacklustre gameplay.



CHOUMAKAIMURA R 2002

SYSTEM: GAME BOY ADVANCE

While this is seen by many as a complete (and very good port of the original SNES game) it's so much more than a simple adaptation. While the original game is as good as you'd expect, it's the superb 'Arrange' mode that makes this an essential addition to your GBA Collection. There are three levels at the end of each stage that unlock depending on what type of armour you are wearing. While many stages are identical to the original SNES game, you'll also get enhanced stages from both arcade games. Graphically, they're extremely impressive, and there are plenty of new bosses to fight as well. Tackling stages from the first two games with access to the double jump makes for some interesting new gameplay, but the difficulty level remains high. The sound is nowhere as strong as the SNES original, and the small screen adds to the game's overall difficulty, but this remains a solid addition to the franchise.

MAXIMO VS ARMY OF ZIN 2003

SYSTEM: PS2

Capcom's enjoyable sequel fixes many of the problems found in the first game, making it an essential play. The frustratingly infuriating save system is completely absent, the difficulty is far more balanced, and you now have full control over the camera (although it can still default to annoying situations). There's no hub, with *Army Of Zin* taking a more linear approach through each stage – the combat system also feels greatly refined. It remains tough, but enemies aren't as aggressive, meaning you can simply get on with enjoying the exploration of *Maximo*'s world. Rescuing villagers results in plenty of presents, and there is a surprising amount of stuff to discover on each level. Graphically it's just as good as the original, with humorous-looking visuals and a pleasingly solid framerate. It's a shame that the planned third game never appeared due to *Army Of Zin*'s atrocious sales.





ULTIMATE GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS 2006

SYSTEM: PSP

After the poor sales of *Maximo*, everyone assumed that Capcom had laid its once-popular series to rest. Capcom clearly felt there was still life in the franchise, however, reuniting with original creator Tokuro Fujiwara to develop the fourth official game in the series. The end result was worth the wait, as *Ultimate* is a highly entertaining addition to the series, although slightly let down by some odd design decisions.

One of its most impressive aspects is how beautiful it looks. Like many games of the time, it utilises 2.5d, allowing for more detailed visuals while keeping the side-on look of the original game. Bosses look spectacular on the PSP's screen, while the levels are well detailed and full of variety. There are plenty of gameplay additions as well, including new weapons, shields that grant Arthur all kinds of special powers and additional items that empower Arthur with bonuses like the double jump.

It has more of an RPG aspect compared to the first three games, with a large and – some might say – annoying emphasis on collecting. In fact, if you don't find the 33 rings that are sneakily hidden throughout the game then you'll never see the true ending. Oh, and on every mode aside from the pig-hard 'Ultimate' mode, Arthur now has access to a life bar, meaning he can take far more hits before dying. This is rather handy, as *Ultimate* is still a resoundingly tough game.



GHOSTS 'N CAMEOS

The many appearances of Arthur and friends

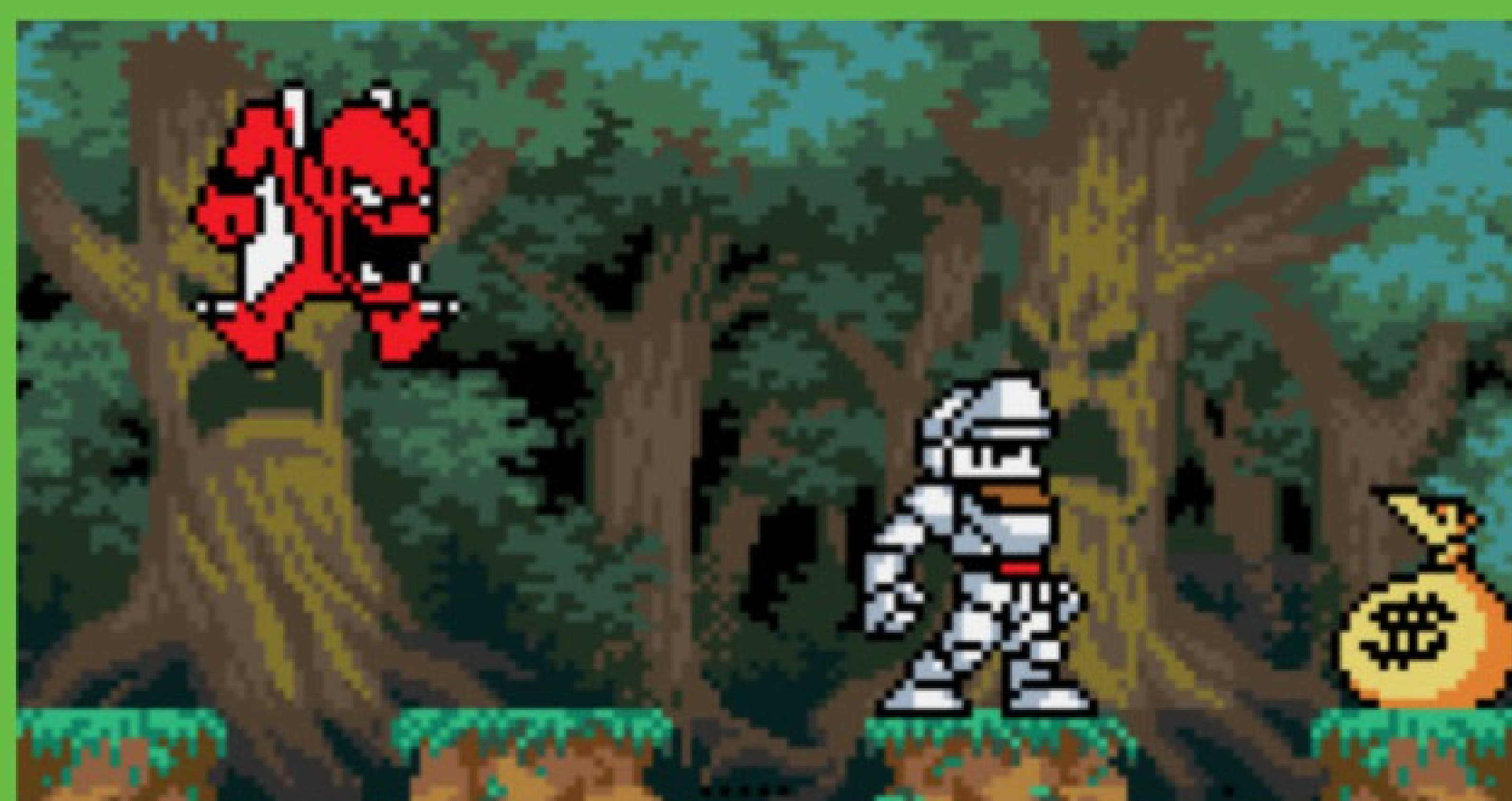
Ghost 'N Goblins was popular enough that characters would typically appear in other Capcom games. There's a heavily armoured version of Arthur in Psikyo's arcade shooter *Cannon Spike*, while his costume is unlockable in *We Love Golf* on the Wii. Arthur also appears in a couple of Neo Geo Pocket games, notably *SNK Vs Capcom: Card Fighter's Clash* and *SNK Vs Capcom: Match Of The Millennium*. *Millennium* is particularly interesting, as Arthur is found in one of its mini-games, where he must collect treasure while avoiding Firebrand.

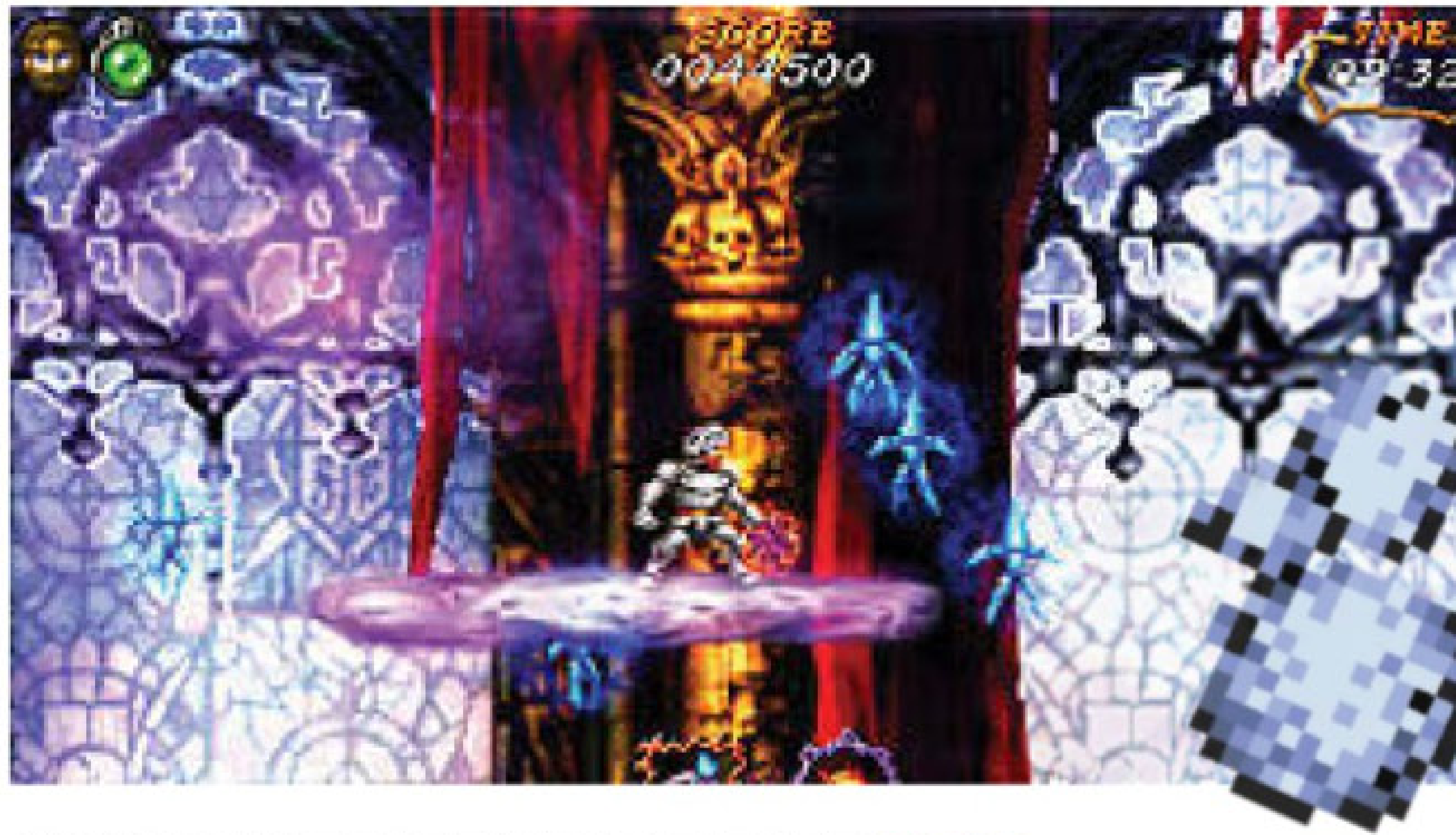
Capcom's knight also appears in the original *Marvel Vs Capcom*. While he's only an assist character, he was upgraded to playable in *Marvel Vs Capcom 3*. Firebrand, on the other hand, appeared as a secret character in *SNK Vs Capcom Chaos*, and was added to the *Ultimate Marvel Vs Capcom 3* roster. Firebrand also shows up in various other games, including appearing as a boss in Capcom's arcade classic *Black Tiger* and the final boss of *Higemaru Makaijima*.

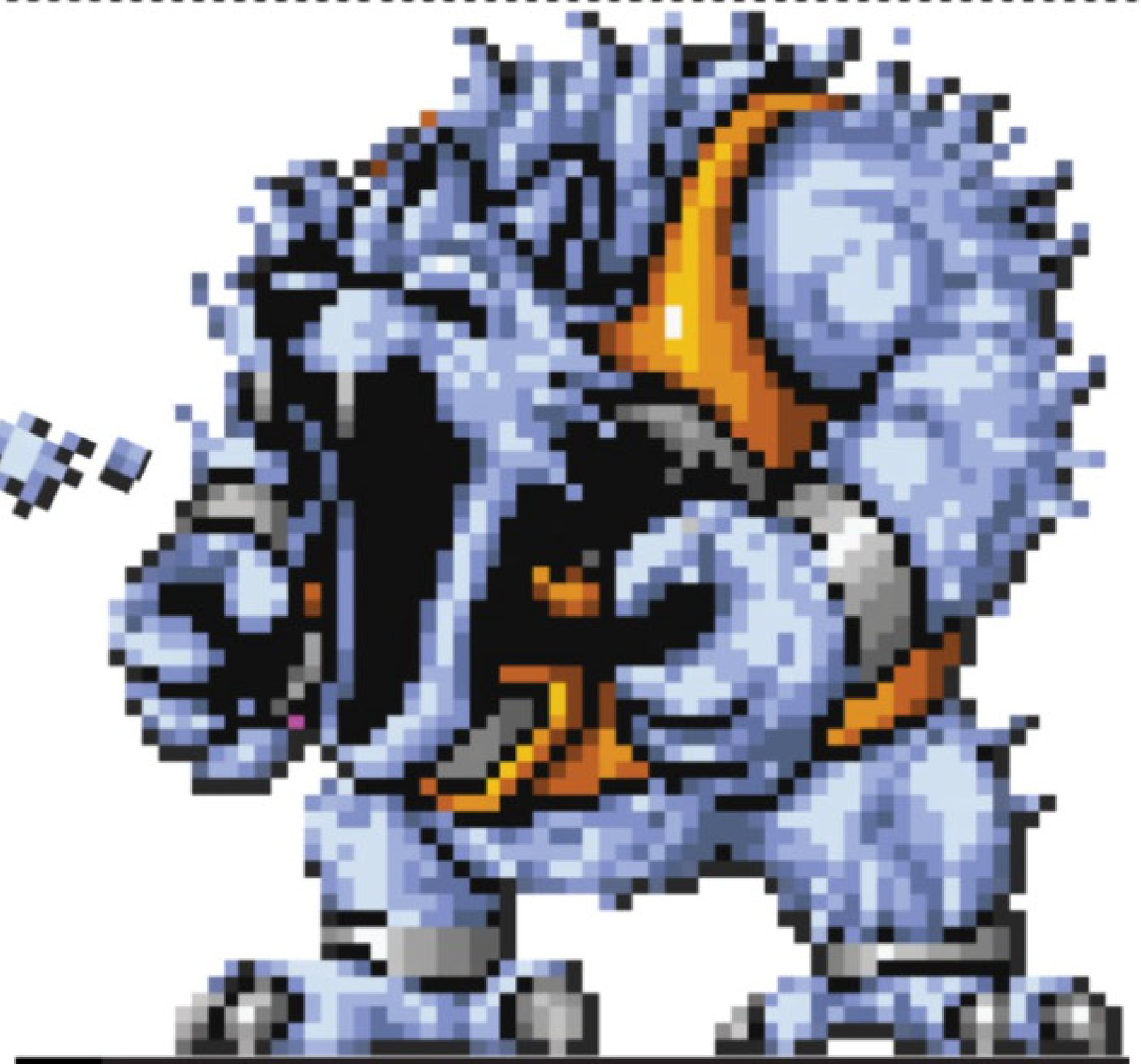
There's a Japanese slot game based on the series called *Geki Makaimura* and a Japanese-only mobile release called *Shoumakaimura* that has Arthur catching falling bags of gold. Perhaps the most interesting connection to Capcom, however, is in the RPG *Namco X Capcom*, which reveals that the Darkstalkers come from the same world as Arthur and Firebrand.











GOKUMAKAIMURA KAI 2007

SYSTEM: PSP

While many enjoyed *Ultimate Ghouls 'N Ghosts*, many still found it too hard or disliked its emphasis on collecting. Hearing this, Capcom released a completely revised version of the game. The life bar was taken out and enemies re-jigged, making it a lot easier than the original. You immediately start off with the double jump, and mid-level checkpoints have been added. All the collecting needed to complete the original game has been removed, and it now requires the traditional 'complete the game twice' to get the proper ending. Sadly, it only came out in Japan, meaning many gamers will have never played it.

"MANY FOUND ULTIMATE GHOULS 'N GHOSTS TOO HARD, OR DISLIKED ITS EMPHASIS ON COLLECTING"

GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS: GOLD KNIGHTS 2009

SYSTEM: IOS

Gold Knights was originally released on older mobile phones in Japan, but Capcom ported it to iPhone. The biggest change to past games is the addition of a new playable character, Lancelot, giving you two distinctly powered heroes to choose from. Graphically it's quite similar to the PSP game, utilising a similar 2.5d approach, but far uglier. The game is a little easier than previous instalments of the franchise, but it's let down by annoying touch controls that make it a real pain to play. Oh, and as it's a mobile game, Capcom has included lots of in-app purchases offering you a better chance of success by letting you buy additional power-ups that decrease the game's difficulty. There are also two additional gameplay modes: 'Skeleton' mode sees you playing as, hey, a skeleton, while 'Boxers' mode starts you off in your undies and uses the familiar one-hit deaths of the earlier games.







GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS: GOLD KNIGHTS II 2010

SYSTEM: IOS

Capcom's last game in the series continues directly on from its predecessor. It introduces Percival, who rescued Arthur at the end of Gold Knights and greatly updates the graphical splendour. Some of the bosses are spectacular to look at, while there are far more interesting set pieces, showing off the impressive visuals. Percival is a good alternative to Arthur, having an extremely powerful dash attack, which certainly makes the game a little easier. He lacks Arthur's insane jumping skills though. While it's a decently balanced game, it once again suffers from fiddly touch-screen controls, meaning you'll often miss a jump or attack through no fault of your own. Ultimately, however, it's a disappointing end to Capcom's long-running series.



INTERVIEW

GEOFF BROWN

Geoff Brown was an able coder but his strength was in spotting the wealth of games being produced in America which he imported to Britain under the name U.S. Gold

Geoff Brown's story is one of being in the right place at the right time and having the necessary vision to make a success of the circumstances that presented themselves. The fledgling computer industry gave him a golden opportunity to make his mark and he did so with U.S. Gold, a games publisher he founded in Birmingham in 1984. U.S. Gold built a reputation on importing some of the best games from the US. Brown secured deals with top developers and publishers, bringing titles such as *Strider*, *Final Fight* and *Street Fighter II* to home computers in the UK. He hired dev teams to convert games to the Spectrum and Amstrad CPC – machines the Americans were uninterested in. As U.S. Gold grew and made acquisitions, Brown invested in some of the best iconic games of all time, even helping to introduce Lara Croft to the world.

You began your career as a professional musician and teacher – when did you become interested in games?
It was while I was teaching in the early Eighties and working part time on Saturdays in a music shop called Woodroffe's in Birmingham. It sold Atari 400 and 800 computers, which were being distributed by a music company and they caught my eye mainly because there was a lot of educational software around for them. I decided – much against my wife's wishes – to buy an Atari 800.

Did you program it?
Yes. One of the first things that occurred to me when I bought the Atari 800 was to program it, mainly because I had a coding background – when I graduated from university with a degree in mathematical physics, I went to work as a programmer on the ICL 1900 series of computers for British Leyland in Birmingham. The easiest thing to write at the time was an educational program so I wrote a couple of them called *Maths for Fun* and *Word Olympics*. I sent them to the English Software Company run by a chap called Philip Morris. He sold them on cassette.

Is that when you realised there was money to be made in software?
The music shop was also selling games, mainly British ones developed by various

I TOLD HIM I WAS FROM A COMPANY CALLED CENTRESOFT, A NAME I JUST MADE UP

people and Atari's own cartridges. I noticed people who were buying the Atari computers were not buying them to program but to play games on. I started to avidly read a computer magazine that the shop sold and I was rather taken by the American programs that were advertised. They looked fantastic compared to what was available in the UK at the time.

Did you buy any of the American games?
I called one of the American companies and said I wanted to get ahold of a game



DEVELOPER COMMENTS

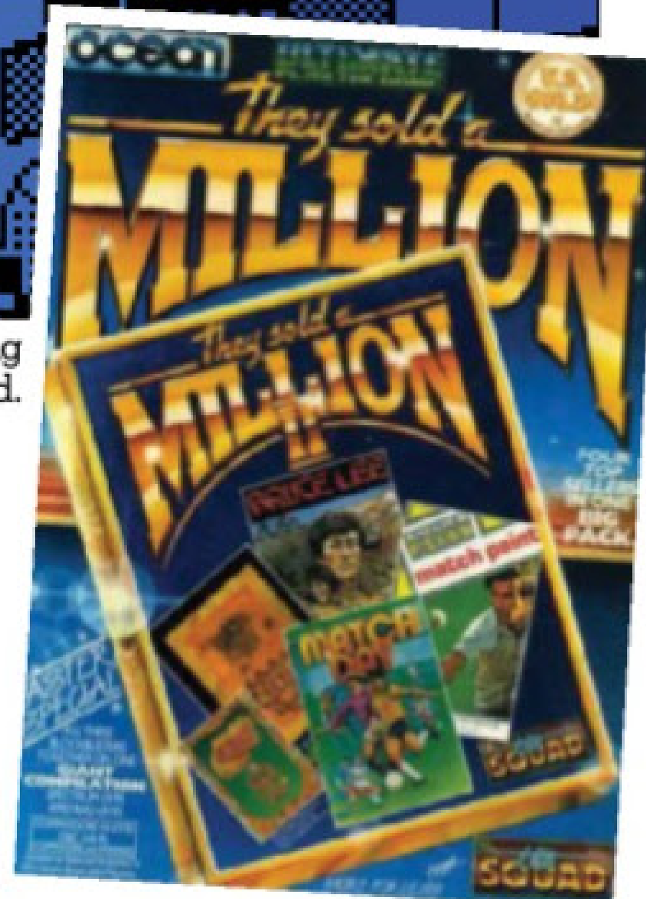
"I knew Geoff before he became involved in the software industry. He used to work in a music shop I ran in Birmingham selling keyboards and all sorts of things on a Saturday part time. I had known him for years and years and years and when he started in the games industry, he quickly built a good team around him. His wife, Anne, was very good financially and Geoff was a clever bloke so by being in the right place at the right time and having the skill to spot an opportunity, he was able to be very successful and entrepreneurial. I remember *Galactic Chase* too – we were both selling the game wholesale at the same time actually. I went off to open a computer shop from where I ran my own business, Adventure International UK which became Adventure Soft and he went on to Centresoft and U.S. Gold."

MIKE WOODROFFE, FOUNDER OF ADVENTURE SOFT, WELL-KNOWN FOR ITS SERIES OF SIMON THE SORCERER GAMES

■ Geoff Brown says he was the first to spot the real potential of *Tomb Raider* when U.S. Gold bought its developer, Core Design.



■ US Gold would place its logo alongside that of the companies whose games it was publishing, in this case Sega.



■ *They Sold A Million* became, in itself, a million-selling compilation in a joint venture by Ocean Software and U.S. Gold.

called *Galactic Chase* for the Atari. It took ages to arrive but when I loaded it up, I thought it was absolutely fantastic. It was on tape rather than cartridge so it was cheaper to buy and it was created by a developer independent of Atari. I wondered if I could sell the game in the UK in some way. I decided to buy 50 copies of *Galactic Chase* and start my own little business.

How easy was it to import from America?
When I asked for the games, they said, 'Would you like an account?' I didn't know what an account was at the time but I said I'd love one. And they said, 'Okay, well, you pay within 30 days of receipt' or something like that. I told my wife, 'I'm buying this game and it's not costing me anything'. Importing wasn't easy, though: I had to pick them up at the Post Office and Customs didn't know what videogames were so it was a real to-do to get them imported. Then I thought, 'Right, now I have to sell them'.

Who did you sell them to?
I could see Curry's were selling games so I went to see the buyer who was heading up the Birmingham branch and I told him I was from a company called Centresoft, a name I just made up, and that I was the distributor of these games in the UK. He asked to look at them, thought they were fantastic and said he wanted to buy some copies. I said he should buy ten and see how they sold. They were put on display and everyone who came in to the store bought a copy. Curry's wanted more. I only had 50 so I sold him the rest and he said he wanted to put them in other Curry's stores. So I bought more copies of *Galactic Chase* games. When Curry's paid me, I paid the American developer and I made a profit in between. By a stroke of luck, the guy who ran Curry's Birmingham became the head buyer of games for the whole of Curry's!



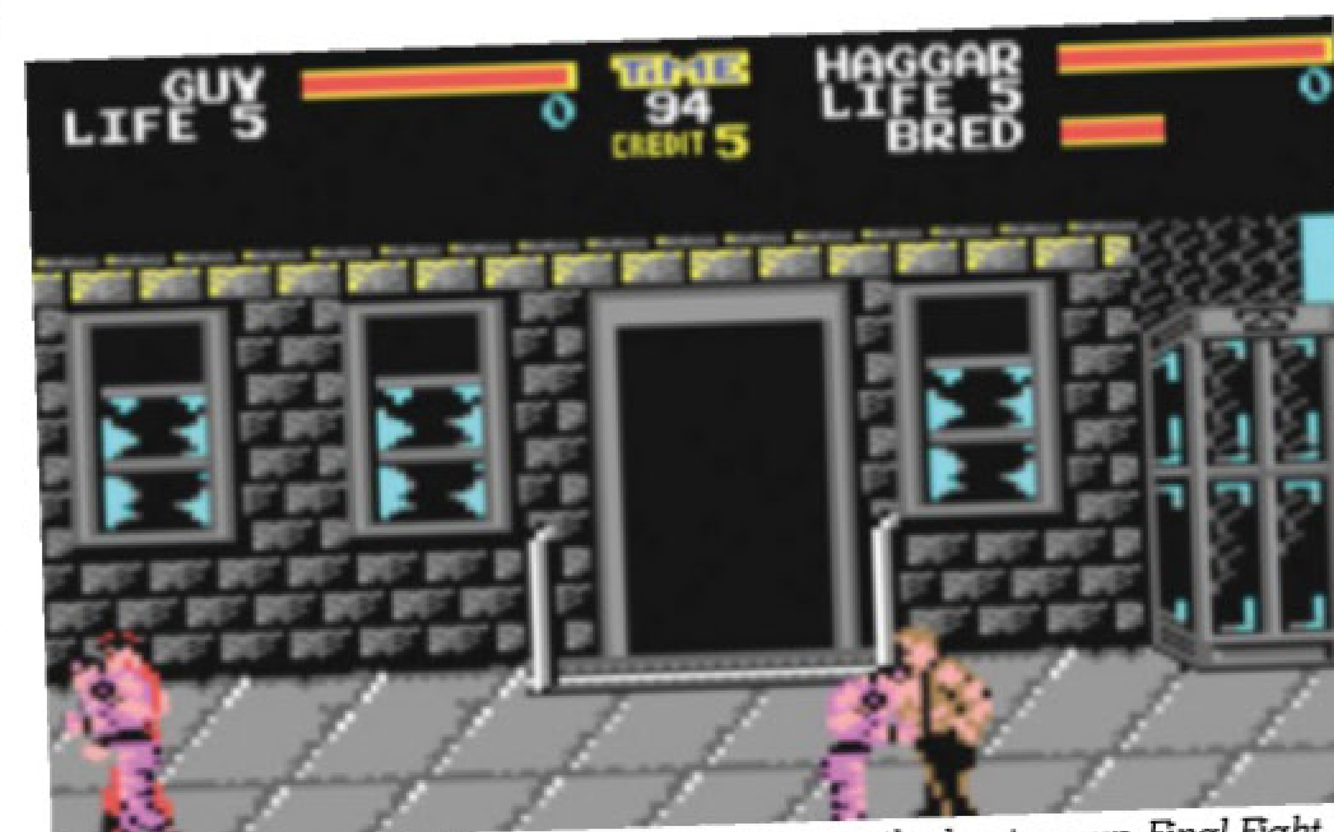
■ CentreSoft was Geoff Brown's distribution company. It came first, with U.S. Gold following as a way to find a universal brand for the games that were being imported.

How did you decide which games to import to the UK from America?
I went out there. Around 1983, I decided to go to Santa Cruz to visit a company that made American educational software. I didn't know what the [games] were like and I hadn't read any reviews but *Beach Head* was one of them, from a company based in Salt Lake City called Access Software. I was in a room with no windows and Bruce Carver was loading up a copy of *Beach Head*. I remember thinking it was totally brilliant so I made an offer to them and said I'd sell, 100,000 copies or something ridiculous like that. I just made it up. I thought, 'What would they do? They wouldn't chase me down in England!'

That was just the start, wasn't it?
Yes. I also saw George Johnson from Cosmi Corporation. I liked the look of *Aztec Challenge* and George had a really good guy working for him called Sid Meier! I said to George, 'Okay, what I'd like to do is import your games and give you a dollar or two for each'. He wanted a guarantee so I said I would sell 10,000 units and he said, 'Yeah, okay'. The thing is, they didn't even realise there was a market in England and they had no export business at all. They were making a lot of money in America and they couldn't care less for anywhere else outside, which was for great for me. I showed these games to Curry's again and they loved them so I brought in a lot, lot more of them.

Were you working from home at this point or had you bought premises?
My garage was getting full of games and Anne Brown, my wife then, was working for a bank. I said I was going to give up teaching, get an office in Halesowen and sell these games. She went crazy; thought I was mad but the games came in, they all sold, and I made a profit in between. Anne's step-father loaned us £17,000 – which seemed an astronomical sum at the time – to build and buy more stock and ship it and pay postage. But *Beach Head*, *Aztec Challenge* and *Forbidden Forest* were doing well. When they came out on the Commodore 64, sales really took off.

But how did the US Gold brand come about?
I was selling tens of thousands of Cosmi's games and so I went to see George. He was talking to me about the days when he sold music cassettes. He said he produced popular compilations called *Gold Hits*. I must have stored this information away because when I woke up one morning, I thought I needed a brand to bring these games together. I created US Gold with the tagline All American Software. I worked with a guy to create the logo which looked like a stamp of approval. The idea was they would still say Cosmi and Access and all of that on them but US Gold too. We'd be like a record label with lots of music and artists.



■ With a deal struck with coin-op giants Capcom, the beat-em-up *Final Fight* was among the gems converted to home computers.



How did this help?
I could advertise the games as a brand, sell them as a brand and market them with brand awareness. The company was growing so much, my wife quit her job and joined me. She was the financial wizard and I was the crazy mad professor. We moved into bigger premises, filled a warehouse in six months and started to take on telesales staff.

U.S. Gold games sold at a premium price. Was there a reason for that?
Others were selling for £6.99 and £7.99, maybe cheaper. I felt US Gold was a premium company so I put up the price to £9.99, which was unprecedented and it made a lot more profit. There was a cache about the brand because it was more expensive with great packaging and more advertising. It helped our profits. Everyone else put their prices up too, jumping on the bandwagon.

Coin-ops were a big part of U.S. Gold, weren't they?
One of the first companies to do a coin-op conversion was Elite with *Ghouls And Ghosts* and I thought, 'Wow, that was a good idea'. Coin-ops were really popular so I flew to Sega in Tokyo, met with the president, used tons of money to entertain and sweet-talk these people and managed to get an exclusive on Sega's coin-ops which gave me *OutRun*. I did the same with Atari for *Gauntlet* and so on. I became the biggest buyer of coin-op licences and the more I got, the more people came to me. I had fantastic times in Japan. Working with Capcom on *Street Fighter* was brilliant.

But you also produced sequels to coin-ops that would continue a series.
Yes, Probe did a great version of *OutRun* and I got the rights from Sega to produce the sequel that was never a coin-op called *OutRun Europa*.

You also created a budget brand called Kixx. Why was that?
Everyone else was doing budget and we thought it would be a good idea to extend the life of our games. So we'd put them into a compilation and then on to budget. The compilations did well and Ocean and ourselves worked hard on them. We produced something together called *They Sold A Million* where each of the games actually had sold a million. The compilation sold another million too so we did *They Sold A Million 2*!

I BECAME THE BIGGEST BUYER OF COIN-OP LICENCES AND THE MORE I GOT, THE MORE PEOPLE CAME TO ME.

Did you ever want an in-house development team?
No. If you work with a third party then you can say we are not paying you because you didn't meet this milestone, you didn't meet the criteria or quality or any other reason and so I thought it was better with external development teams because you could crack the whip more.



■ When Geoff Brown saw that the games from the US weren't being ported to the Spectrum, he commissioned teams to do that, which is how *Impossible Mission* got to the Spectrum.

Why did you decide to float Centresoft and US Gold and was it a good move for you?
We floated what was Centregold for around £60 to £90 million and we were the first to go public on the stock exchange. I made tens of millions and it was a way for me to capitalise on ten years of really hard graft and stress. But once it had happened I got a bit lazy. I sort of lost my spark.

So you sold to Eidos...
I was never designed to be a CEO of a public company. I should have let someone else take the helm. Eidos made a very good offer and I thought let's sell and make more money for the investors. Eidos sold the distribution business to Activision but kept US Gold along with Domark and some other brands. I went on their board as worldwide publishing director, which I hated too. I wasn't in control of my destiny. I thought I had made enough money and success so I went off and did my own thing.

But you had a hand in *Tomb Raider*...
Just before I sold to Eidos, Core Design was in trouble. I went to see their products and made an offer. I thought *Tomb Raider* was fantastic and I always say I was the person who spotted the potential of it. When we sold to Eidos, I held a massive meeting in Birmingham and told every attendee it would be a phenomenal game. I had a nose and an eye for what would do well – I didn't need to play the games, I knew instinctively.

What do you look back on most fondly?
I think what makes me smile was taking that model of music – musicians, charts, singles, great hits and compilations – and overlaying that on to the videogame business. It was like pop music except no one knew who the artists were. It was great fun.



■ Coin-op conversions became a very important part of U.S. Gold's output as *OutRun* showed.

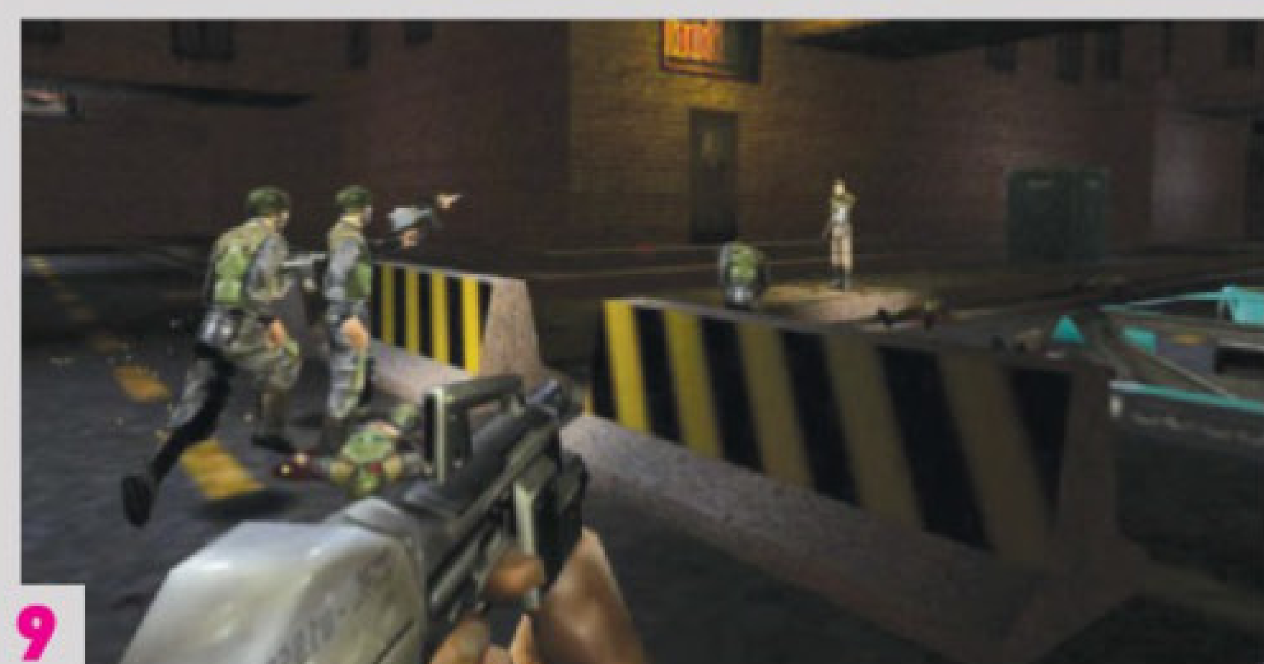
ESSENTIALS

10 CHARACTERS YOU LOVE TO KILL (BUT SHOULDN'T)

■ It's well documented that all videogame characters are sociopaths. However, as faint as it may be, there is a line, and it turns out you can go too far. But sometimes the characters designed to be the most empathetic – those cloying companions, the feeble alien races praying for salvation – beg to be put out of their misery. Set your conscience to guilty as **games™** presents ten characters you just can't help but kill...

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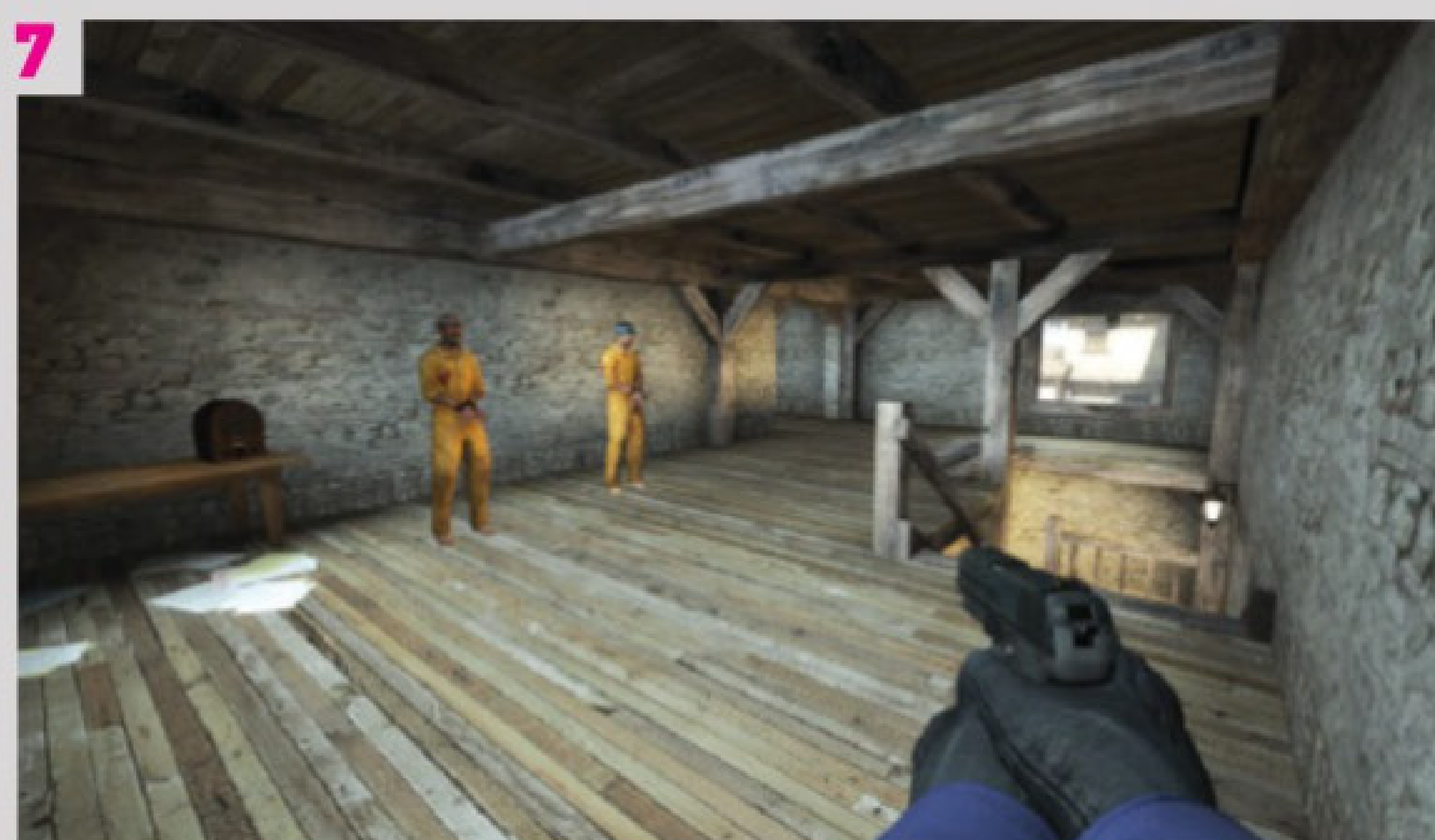


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Survivors
From: Dead Rising 2
Year: 2010

10 Everyone has a story, which is kind of the problem with the survivors that are running around in *Dead Rising 2*. The objective of the game is to try and rescue as many as possible, while simultaneously supplying a life-saving cure for those who have been bitten. But who really wants to help a bunch of shrill, whiney assholes with not a discernable inch of personality between them? Nobody, that's who. Which is why we took so much joy in speeding up their date with the hereafter. Between them and the zombies, we'd take the zombies.

Civilians
From: Deus Ex
Year: 2000

9 None of the civilians in *Deus Ex* deserved to die – and it's not as if this *Matrix*-riff represented them as a possible threat. Instead, what the civilians represented in Warren Spector's classic cyber-thriller was something completely different: unprecedented freedom. Indeed, *Deus Ex* introduced a world that enabled you to interact with it in your own manner, and the temptation to just let it descend into chaos – indiscriminately killing innocent bystanders – was as liberating as gaming got at the time. Morally wrong, but liberating.

Penguin Baby
From: Super Mario 64
Year: 1996

8 There's a small penguin, helpless and alone, who inadvertently wandered off from its mother. Distraught and frightened, help comes in the form of a portly plumber, dressed in red who offers to reunite the family. Well, at least that was his intention. Admit it, you couldn't help yourself but pick the little bird up and drop him over the edge of the level and down into the abyss. You probably even let out a little laugh, you utter bastard. But at least you're not the only one.

Hostages
From: Counter-Strike
Year: 1999

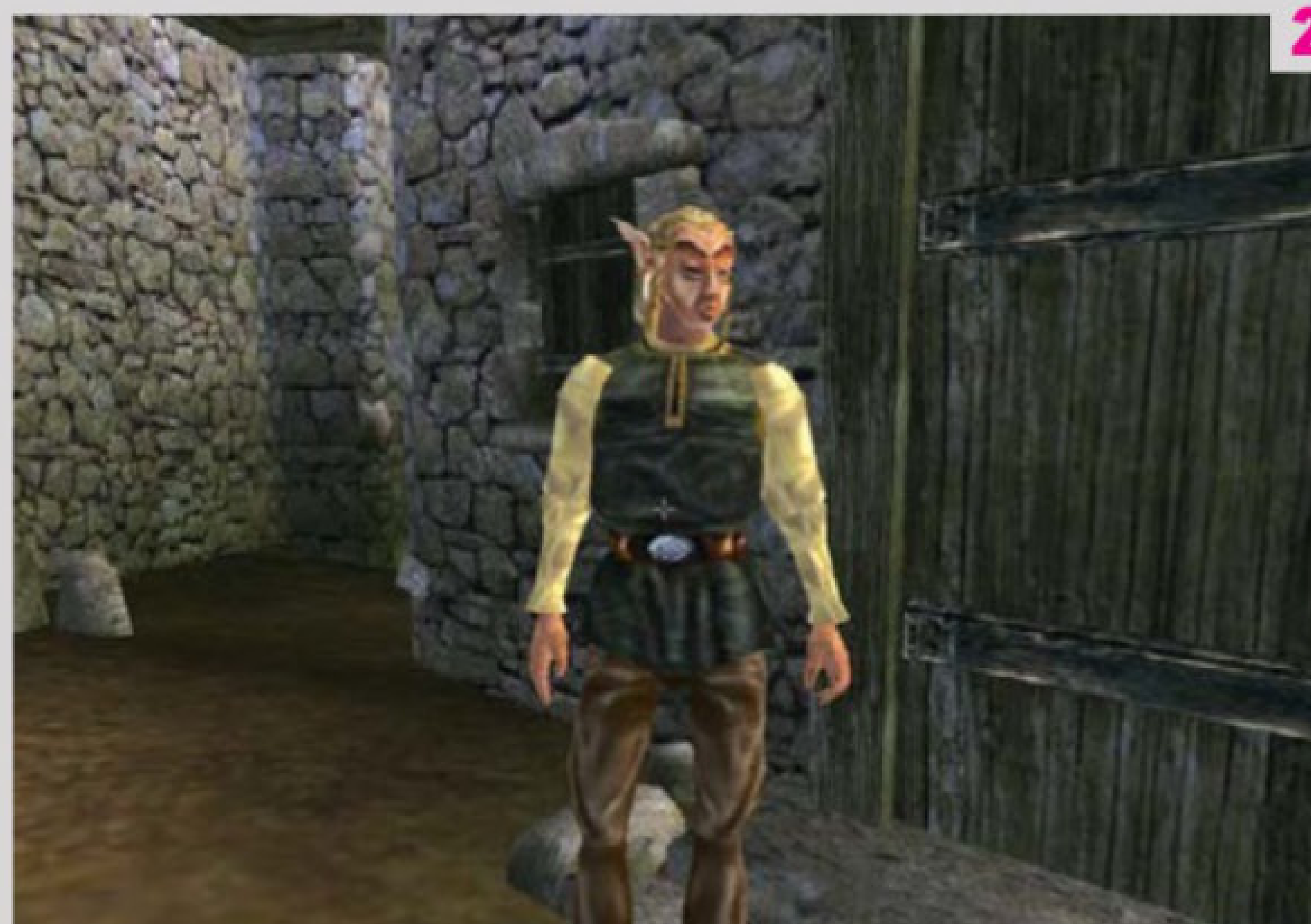
7 Hostages serve multiple purposes in competitive online shooter *Counter-Strike*. They are an objective for the counter-terrorist team to rescue and, therefore, can be used as a lure by their rivals. They also make a pretty good shield if you're feeling particularly cowardly. But if you're the ultimate anarchist, execution was always a temptation. You lose a ton of cash, but the trade-off is a priceless moment of realisation from the opposite team: only one of you is getting out of this alive.

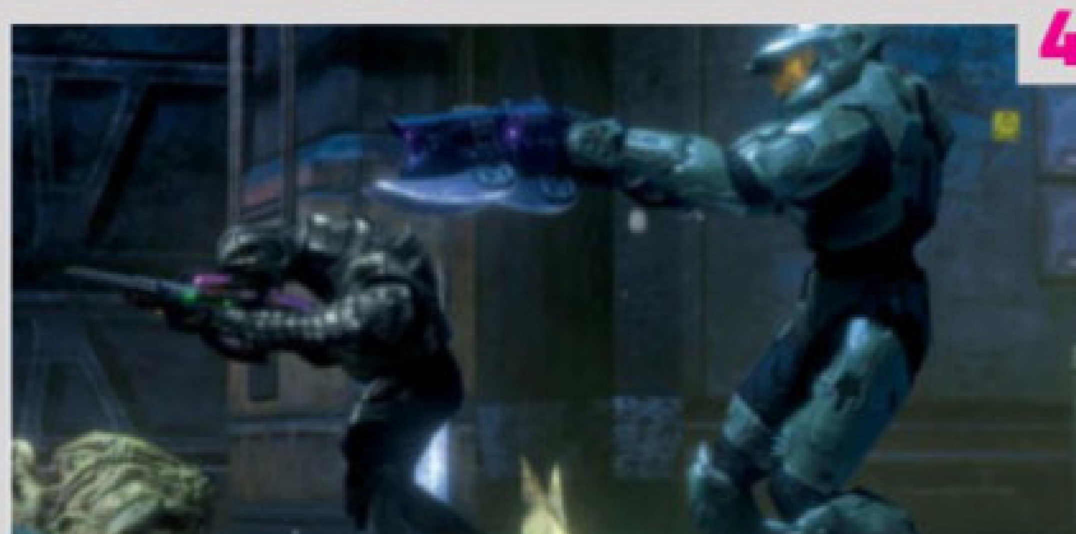
Any GTA Protagonist
From: Grand Theft Auto (series)
Year: 1997-Present

6 The *Grand Theft Auto* series has always been one that has pushed both its characters and players into self-destruct mode. Indeed, the theme of power corrupting the soul is a potent one that runs throughout the entire length of the franchise, and that's as much a part of the player experience as a narrative one. Armed with all the most explosive weapons, fastest cars and uncanny gadgets, self-preservation flies out the window and subsequently shot down with a bazooka. *GTA* is about extremes and finding out just how far is *too* far.



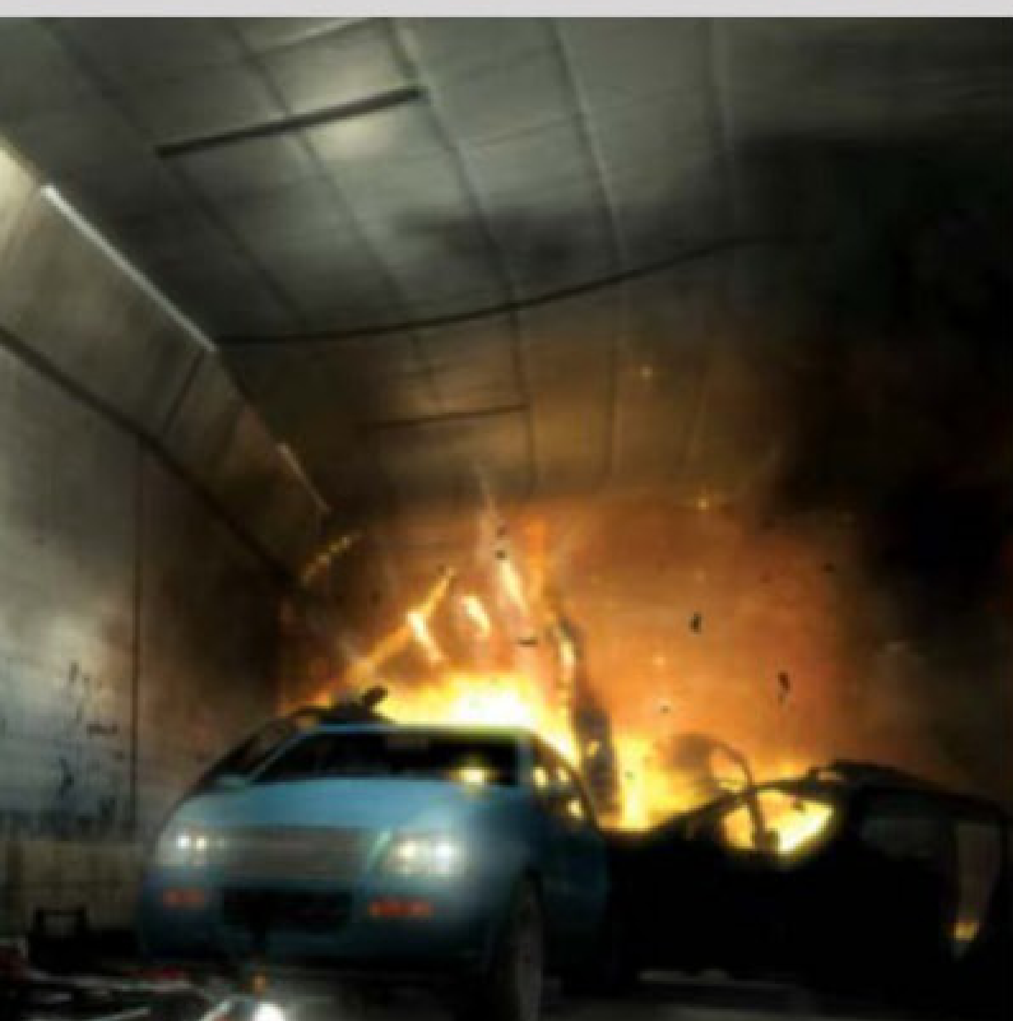

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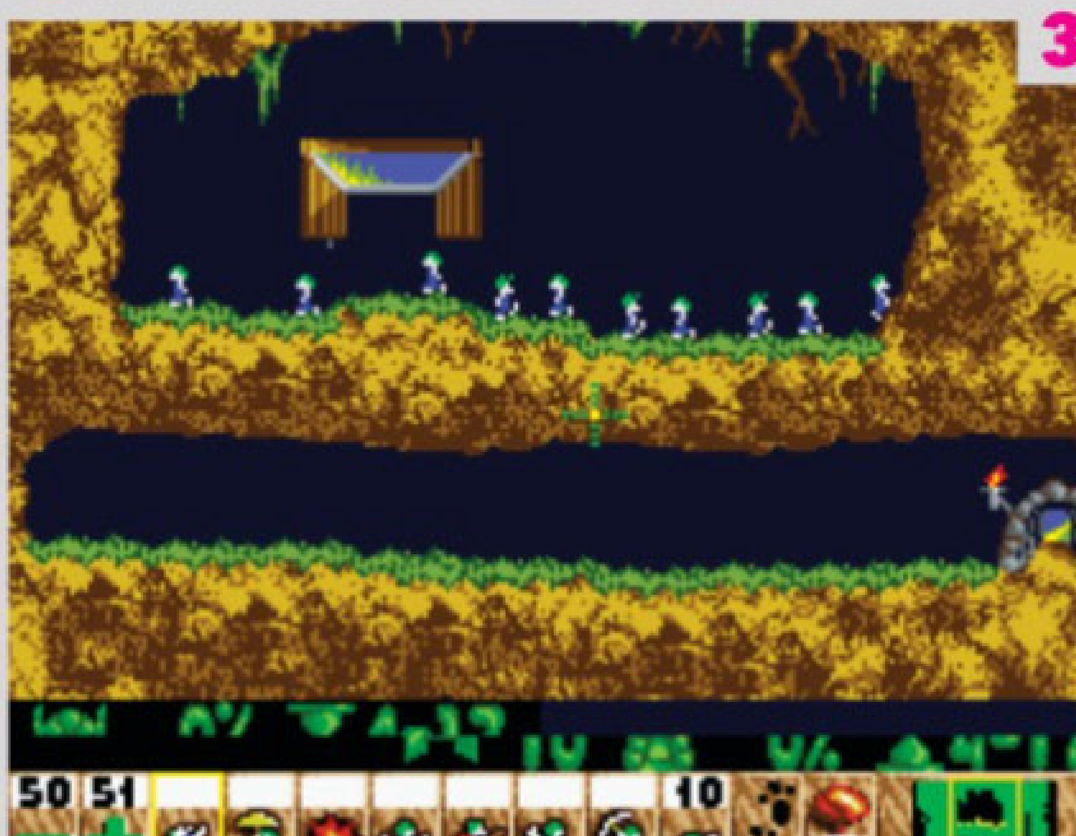

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Lara Croft
From: Tomb Raider
Year: 1996-Present

5 It's not uncommon for the world's most intrepid explorer to come across some fairly hazardous situations in her profession (whatever that is), but it's an act of cruel coding to make those precarious scenarios morbidly intriguing. From T-Rex attacks to pool-side safety, the *Tomb Raider* series has always indulged those dark enough to explore what grisly misfortune could potentially befall Lara. Even Crystal Dynamic's recent reboot couldn't help itself relishing in the myriad creative demises – a triumph in modern gaming over screens.

The Arbiter
From: Halo 3
Year: 2007

4 It shouldn't have been so fun to kill him, on reflection – he was a pretty handy piece of mobile cannon fodder. Still, whenever we got bored or waiting for the ol' Covenant defect to jump aboard our Warthog or something, it was cathartic to just go and beat him to death with the butt of our shotgun, stick a few sticky grenades to him and watch him collapse to the floor. His death was never permanent, of course; he'd always be back on his feet in seconds, and if you killed him more than twice, he'd (justifiably) turn against you.

Lemmings
From: Lemmings
Year: 1991

3 There's no uncertainty as to your role in preventing the extinction of the Lemmings race. As the benevolent deity, your duty is to guide each of the little critters to sanctuary, moving rock and soil to get each soul from one side of the screen to the other. But then there's that option, that teasing red button that allows you to throw compassion aside and just nuke all the little bastards, made strangely satisfying by the staggered explosions. That's a popping sound that you're hearing. It's almost like popcorn.

Fargoth
From: The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind **Year:** 2002

2 Fargoth isn't really any more or less annoying than any other wood elf that you stumble across in *Morrowind*, but there's something about his effusive demeanour (not to mention his unprovoked attachment to your player-character) that rubbed some players up the wrong way. Like an overly attentive waiter, Fargoth outstayed his welcome, so it's no surprise that the creative might of the internet spawned several mods specifically to offer a variety of methods to dispatch the cheery chap. In comparison, that 'Arrow In The Knee' guard got off lightly.

Natalya
From: GoldenEye 007
Year: 1997

1 Natalya is a bit of a nuisance in Rare's classic shooter on N64. Constantly treading on your heels, her ability to awkwardly positioning herself in danger (or a doorway) makes her presence an inescapable burden. One thing that it turns out she *is* good at is taking a few bullets. There's a Buckaroo!-style game to be played here: how many times can you get away with shooting Natalya before it's game over? That might be the most sadistic thing we've ever printed in **games™**, but given her apparent penchant for causing Bond's death on numerous occasions, it feels like justice.

THE VAULT

HALO 2: OST VINYL REISSUE

MANUFACTURER: **BUNGIE** PRICE: **TBA**



TO MARK THE upcoming release of *Halo: Master Chief Collection* (and to celebrate the ten-year anniversary of *Halo 2*), Bungie and Microsoft are reissuing the *Halo 2* OST, now remastered. The game will feature the ability to swap between the old and new graphics and sound engines on the fly – a more immediate switch than was available in *Halo: Anniversary*. In light of this, the team had to adapt and re-orchestrate the entire soundtrack, mixing it for surround sound output, whilst also upgrading the sound quality to match the levels of stereo speakers gamers have adopted since the launches of the X360 and PS3.

The vinyl will collect all these features onto a single disc, all the tracks glued together with segues and interludes that evoke the celestial calm of the *Halo* universe with the thudding and tense intervals of action the game paces itself with. For the more intense parts of the soundtrack, original guitarist Steve Vai makes a return, gracing Marty O'Donnell's ambience with electric guitar licks of his own. There'll also be new guest musicians appearing to lend a hand to O'Donnell – Misha Mansoor, for example, will provide the heavier, more 'metal' elements to the remastered OST. We assume (and hope) the album will be pressed on the same gorgeous turquoise disc as the first release of the OST.



FALLOUT BOBBLEHEADS

If you collected all 20 bobbleheads in *Fallout 3*, you can relieve the excitement by grabbing them in real life – with each guaranteed to permanently increase your skills and stats! (Disclaimer: may not increase skills or stats).

http://www.thinkgeek.com/product/1af2



RPG SCENTED OILS

Make your nights in with your favourite fantasy RPG even more immersive with a series of scented oils designed to evoke the sense of those slightly more exotic places you can visit only in the fantasy genre.

http://www.thinkgeek.com/product/1a0f/



TRIGGER TREADZ

If you're having trouble getting to grips with the new Xbox or PlayStation pads, fear not: the Trigger Treadz stick-on traction pads from iMP Tech will give that extra bit of grip you need for those über-tense moments.

http://www.triggertreadz.com/

GAMING CLOTHING



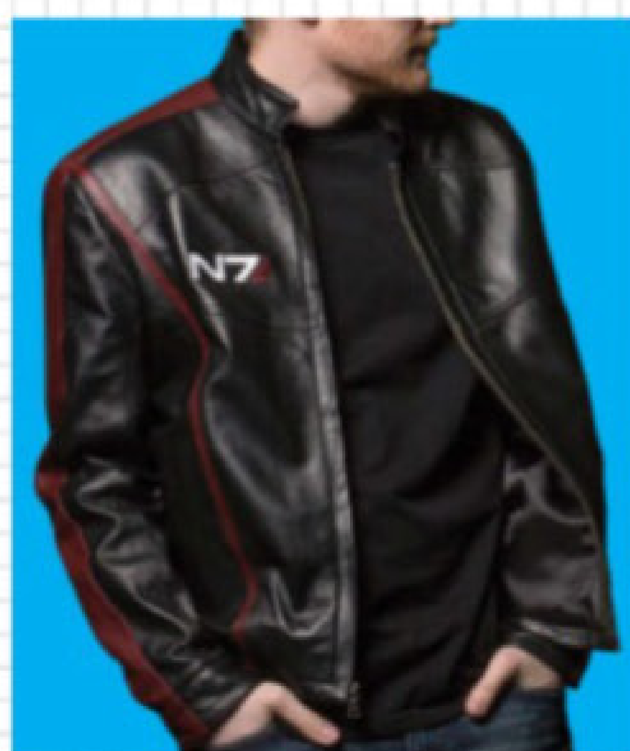
PORTAL 2 APERTURE SCIENCE SILK TIE

If you've always wanted to rock your interest in gaming in a more professional manner, you can now subtly hint at your love of *Portal*. **http://www.thinkgeek.com/product/1a0f**



WINTER SOLDIER JACKET

Captain America: The Winter Soldier was released on Blu-ray last month, but if that wasn't enough, why not dress like your favourite Super Soldier? **http://www.dudeiwantthat.com/style/clothing/captain-america-winter-soldier-jacket.asp**



N7 LEATHER JACKET

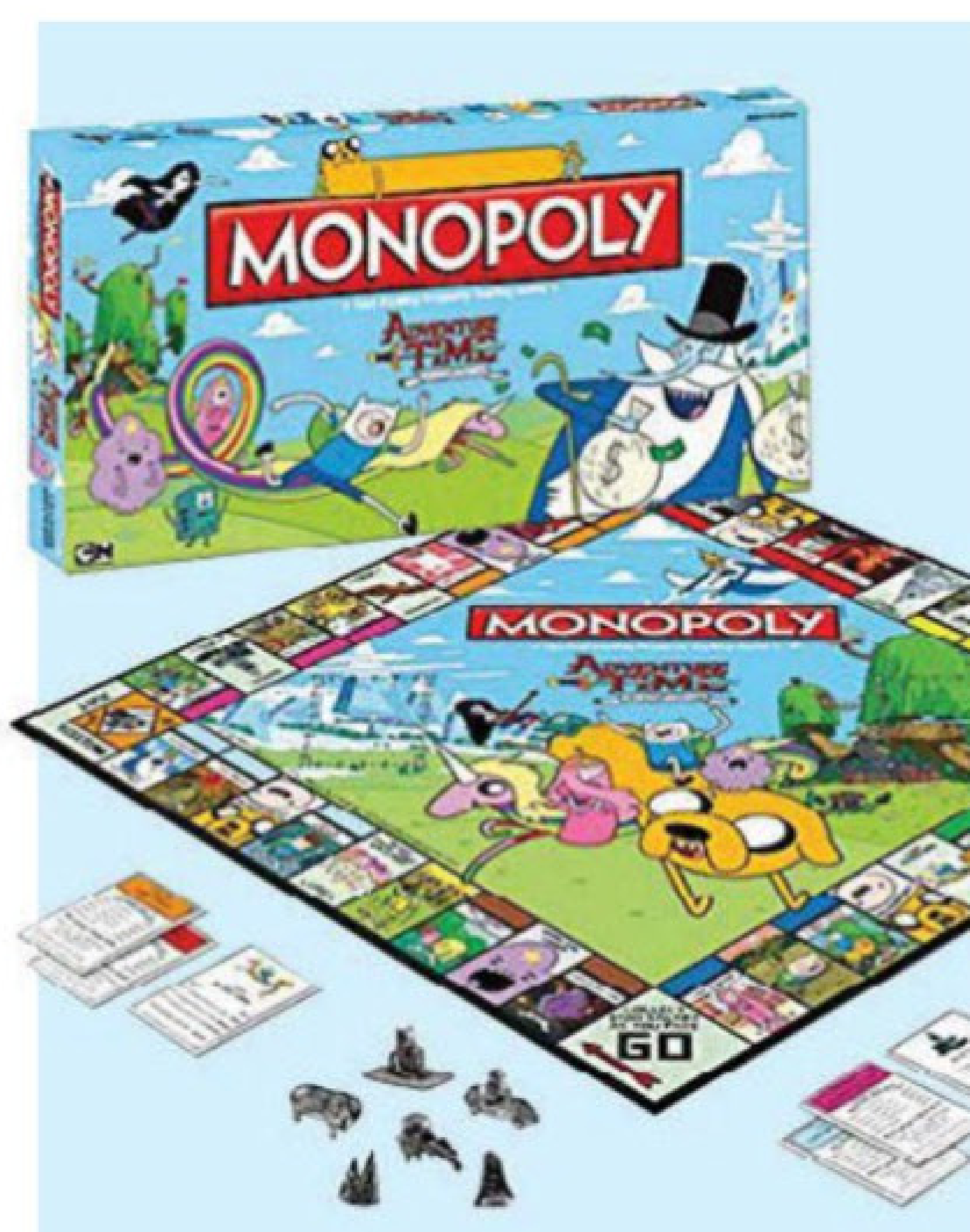
Perhaps you've recently bought a motorcycle and need something to tell everyone, while reminding them you're a badass renegade? **http://www.biowarestore.com/apparel/jackets/n7-leather-jacket.html**

WORLD OF TANKS RUSH

DISTRIBUTER: **WARGAMING** PRICE: **£19.99**

NOT CONTENT WITH dominating the action-MMO scene, Wargaming has recently mobilised its tanks and encroached on the borders of mobile gaming, with *World Of Tanks Blitz* rocketing to the top of the App Store in a matter of days. Still not satisfied, the publishing juggernaut has turned its turret on physical gaming too, releasing a deck-building board game that takes the strategy of the infamous MMO and concentrates it into a card-game. The artwork is provided by the same team that works on the online game, and the tactics involved here will be a little less crazy than what you'll be used to if you frequently log into wargaming.net, but the core principal remains the same: build up a deck, reinforce yourself, blast your way to victory. Fans of the vanilla *World Of Tanks* experience: this is made for you.





ADVENTURE TIME MONOPOLY

DISTRIBUTOR: **ABC** PRICE: **£44.95**

WE KNOW LICENCES are expensive, but a *Monopoly* set for £45 is a bit much; you could almost argue that Hasbro has a monopoly on themed business simulator board games. Lame puns aside, if you're a real *Adventure Time* aficionado or just like collecting limited editions of *Monopoly* sets, this is for you. There are nods to the show (subtle and not-so-subtle) littered throughout the game and its myriad pieces. 'Algebraic' and 'What the Lump?' cards replace Community Chest and Chance cards, while the top hat figure is replaced with the Ice King's cursed crown, and the ol' Westie is replaced with Jake (but you saw that coming, right?). It's a great experience for anyone au fait with the Cartoon Network series, but no doubt baffling to anyone that doesn't know what you mean when you say "What the math?" in puzzlement.

JUSTICE LEAGUE CHESS SET

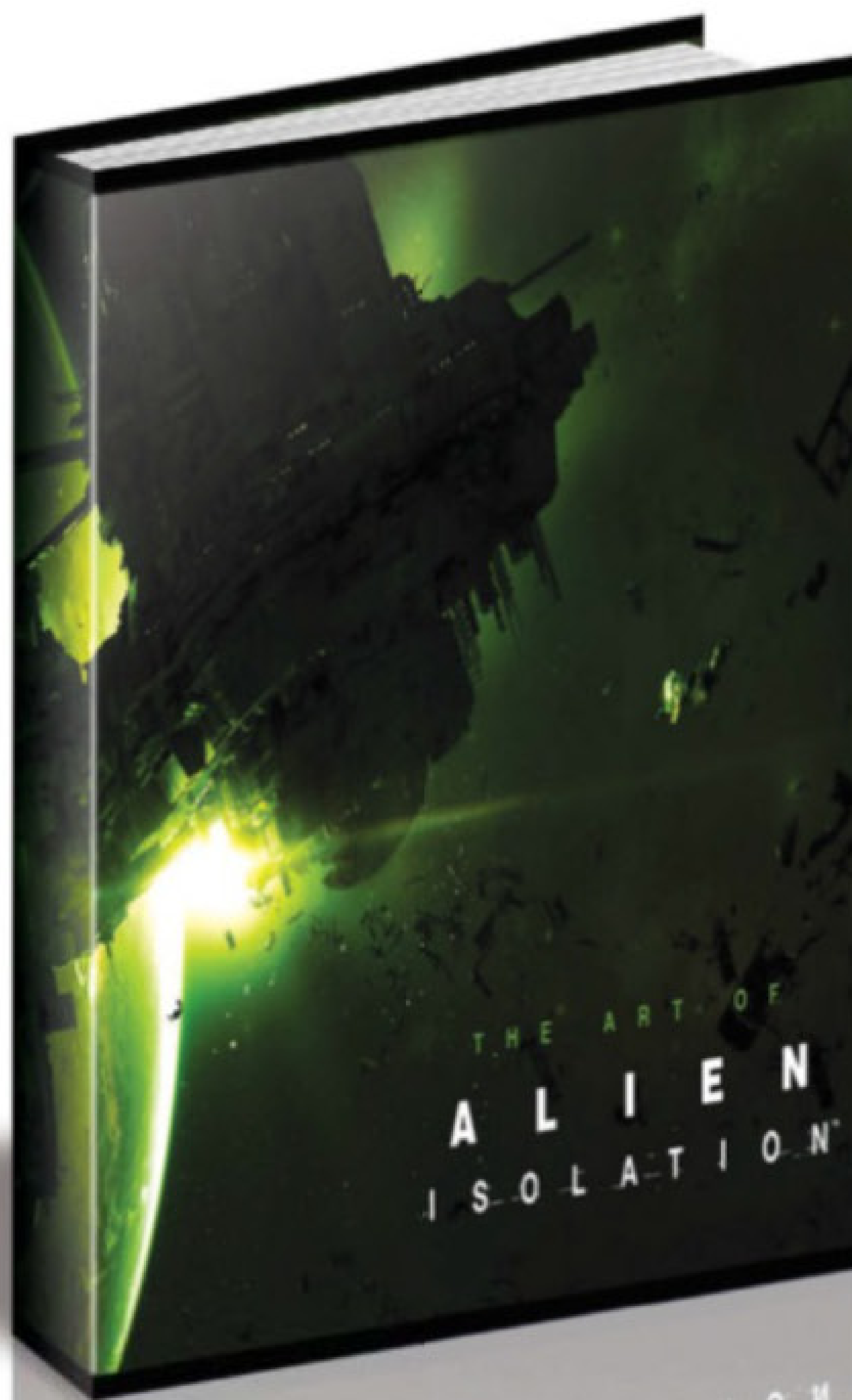
DISTRIBUTOR: **DIAMOND SELECT TOYS** PRICE: **£224.99**

IT'S AN ARGUMENT that comes up in bars all the time (at least for us): who would win in the ultimate fight between the world's greatest superheroes and the world's most nefarious super villains? Well, now you can decide the fate of the world (be it Earth One or 919) for yourselves – the DC Justice League chess set weighs in with a hefty price, but the production value is arguably worth it. Every figure is intricately crafted and die-cast, with the most notable heroes and villains from each side of the DC moral line faithfully recreated in chess-piece form. We find it entertaining that Aquaman is merely a pawn on the hero's side: no one loves Aquaman, not even DC merchandisers.



THE ART OF ALIEN ISOLATION (LIMITED EDITION)

PUBLISHER: **TITAN BOOKS**



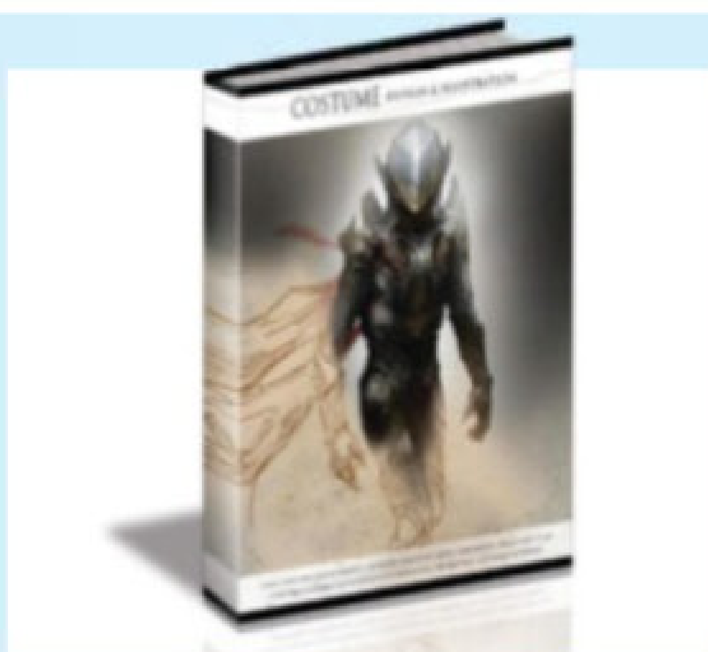
IT MAY NOT be the work of HR Giger, but the art of *Alien: Isolation* takes a lot of inspiration from the master of modern horror art. A cursory look down artist Bradley Wright's blog shows a clear influence from Giger – from gothic body horror to cybernetically augmented humans, his work is flush with the same dark detail as the original mind behind the *Alien* franchise. This isn't the first time Wright has worked in games, either: he worked on the weird and wonderful fantasy world of *Brothers: A Tale Of Two Sons*.

The hardback coffee-table book collects 300 images that were used extensively for reference during the development phase of the game. The art is varied: storyboard excerpts, sketches of the disintegrating Sevastopol space station and full-length ink and pencil sketches of the Alien and supporting cast form the bulk of the content, making the hardcover edition the perfect accompaniment to Creative Assembly's latest survival horror experience.

Creative Assembly has cited the claustrophobic and oppressive atmosphere of Ridely Scott's original film as inspiration for the game on multiple occasions, and the art supporting the game reinforces that: there's something very *Alien* about every panel and every concept. This isn't just a game thrown into the license; this is a passion project that grew out of a dedicated team's love of the series.

The book is bolstered by commentary from the team at Creative Assembly too, as well as musings and observations from Wright himself. If you're a true *Alien* devotee, this book is a necessary and worthwhile addition to your collection.

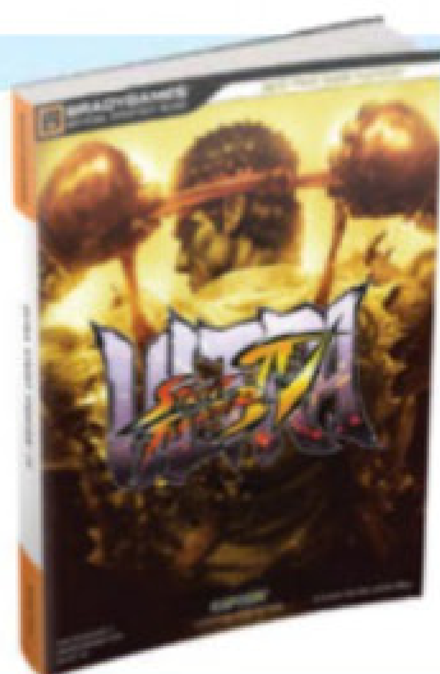
VERDICT 8/10



COSTUME DESIGN & ILLUSTRATION (FOR FILM, VIDEO GAMES & ANIMATION)

With the majority of this written by Constantine Sekeris – author of *MeramorFX* – this takes a close look at the nuances of costume design in futuristic settings across cinema, games and animation.

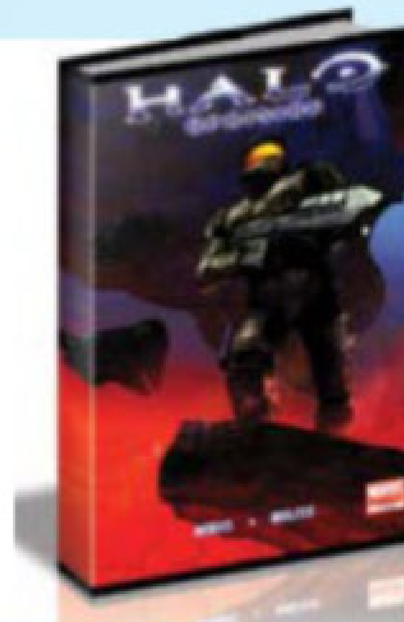
https://forbiddenplanet.com



ULTRA STREET FIGHTER IV BIBLE

The BradyGames guides to games are always good, but the *Ultra Street Fighter IV Bible* takes the focus on strategy further than usual: a complete collection of framedata, hitboxes and attack effects are listed. Not for beginners, but almost vital for mid-tier players.

http://www.amazon.co.uk



HALO: UPRISING

The Eisner Award-winning team of Brian Michael Bendis and Alex Maleev take on the *Halo* franchise, bringing Bendis' ear for human dialogue and Maleev's uniquely dream-like art together to chart the previously untold story that took place between *Halo 2* and *3*.

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